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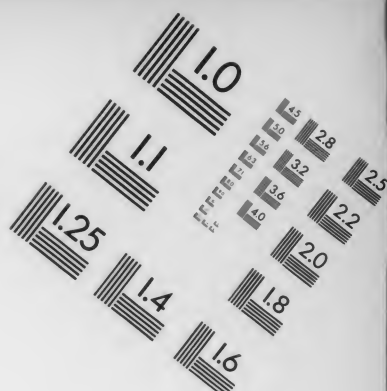
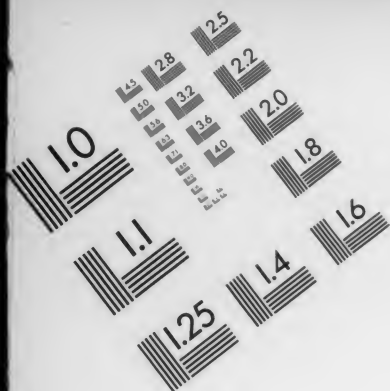


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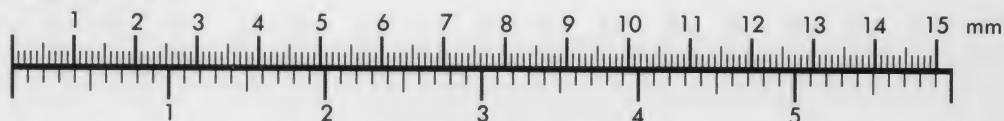
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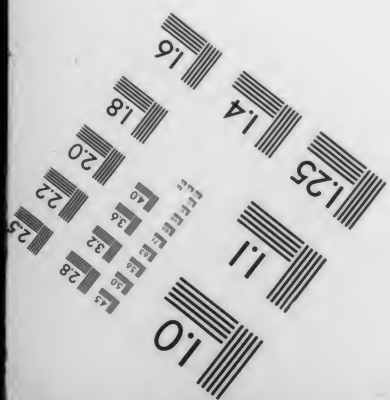
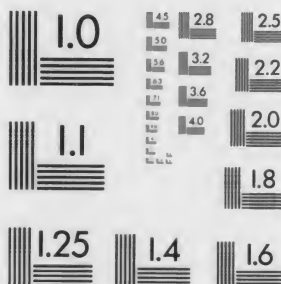
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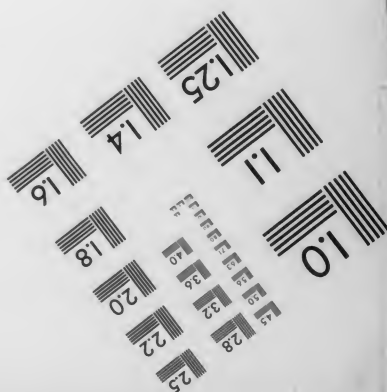
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NORMAL STUDIES FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

FROM CHRIST TO CONSTANTINE
CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST
THREE CENTURIES.
BY
WALTER F. ADENEY, M.A.,

Columbia University
in the City of New York

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AUTHOR OF

"THE HEBREW UTOPIA: A STUDY OF MESSIANIC PROPHECY," ETC.

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* The limits of space make it necessary that the great subject of this little book should be confined to the external course of Christianity during the first three centuries, together with only such internal points as Church government and the social life of the Christians. Literature and doctrine in the writings of the fathers and the controversies of heresy demand separate treatment.

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CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST
THREE CENTURIES.

INTRODUCTION.

"The fulness of the time"—The Roman empire—Greek culture—
The Jews—State of religion—Moral condition of the world.

1. "The Fulness of the Times."—The advent of Jesus Christ, and with it the dawn of Christianity on our earth, occurred, we are told, at "the fulness of the times." If we look at the character of the age when those great events took place, we may understand to some extent what this "fulness" was. It seems to have consisted chiefly in two things—in preparation and in need. There was then both a wonderful association of circumstances tending to prepare the world for the reception of the gospel, and a terrible climax in the world's need of redemption. The break-up of old heathen faiths and the melting away of the limitations and prejudices of antiquity disposed men to listen to the preaching of a new religion which was proving itself to be spiritual, humane, and universal. The utter failure of pagan religion from its immorality, and of pagan philosophy from its impotence to cure that immorality and the misery that accompanied it, called loudly for some fresh influence which should be both pure and powerful. It was the most remarkable epoch in all history.

Everything was in transition and fusion. Old things were passing away; but there seemed to be little hope that they would give birth to a better future. The fruit of the ancient order was rotting on the tree without yielding the seeds of a new order. A mongrel eclecticism was all that the wisest men could produce. Yet there were strange rumours of coming relief afloat; and singular hopes stirred the breasts of men who heard that some great One from the East was to arise and renovate the world.

2. The Roman Empire.—The political condition of the world was singularly fitted to prepare men for the reception of Christianity. Almost the whole of the then known earth was included under the government of Rome. What was called the *Pax Romana* kept the several nations under its sway from the internecine warfare which used to be their normal condition. Wherever the Roman went he made good roads. The golden milestone which Augustus set up in the Forum at Rome marked the spot towards which these highways from the most remote districts all converged. Along them, after the soldier, came the scholar and the merchant. Commercial and intellectual intercourse united the various nations. All this enabled the missionaries of the cross to travel freely, as they could never have done when the old national barriers divided state from state. Wherever they went they were still under the same orderly government, enjoying the same rights and privileges. But far more important than the physical convenience arising from this political condition of the world, was its intellectual and moral effects. The universalism of the Roman government prepared the way for the universalism of the Christian religion. The old national distinctions were bound up with religious distinctions. Each country had its own gods. The attempt to acclimatize the deity of another people used to be regarded as unpatriotic, unnatural, monstrous. The Christian preacher would have found it

almost impossible to make way against such a prejudice. But with the barriers of national distinction, the boundaries of religious exclusiveness were swept away before the triumphant advance of the Roman eagles. The gods of all the nations were deported to Rome and worshipped there. Not only law, but religion, philosophy, literature, and social habits, came to assume a cosmopolitan character.

The social and intellectual influence of Rome was naturally more effective in civilizing the barbarous nations of the West than in modifying the habits of the East, where she met an older and a higher culture than her own. Mr. Matthew Arnold describes the attitude of this ancient civilization in poetry which is as true as it is powerful—

“The East bowed down before the blast
In patient, deep disdain;
She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again.”

Yet even the East was so far brought out of her seclusion and stagnation as to be expectant of a new course of events in religion and life.

3. Greek Culture.—Side by side with the extension of the Roman government was the spread of Greek culture. Wide as was the area over which the Latin language was spoken, the Greek language was even more extensively used. It was the language of philosophy and learning. All educated people were expected to know it. Thus it became the medium through which Christian missionaries could preach to a great variety of peoples. They had not to endure the tedious delay which our missionaries have to submit to in acquiring a new language. In Syria, in Egypt, in Phrygia, in Italy, as well as in Greece and Asia Minor, they could make themselves well understood by the use of the common tongue of all teachers. That language was so delicately modulated as to surpass all other forms of speech in its fitness for expressing new ideas. It was

exactly what was wanted for the setting forth of a fresh revelation to the world at large.

4. **The Jews.**—The condition of the Jewish nation was another feature in "the fulness of the times." The law had fulfilled its office as "the tutor" to bring its followers to Christ. The time was ripe for the accomplishment of ancient prophecy. And this accomplishment was most urgently needed. Sadduceism had leavened the ruling classes and infected the national worship with its sceptical conservatism and its aristocratic secularism. Pharisaism, which represented the religious ideas of the popular party, was too often only formal and hypocritical; and when it was genuine it was hard and cold, binding unbearable burdens and exacting impossible righteousness. The Jews had lost their liberty, and they seemed about to relinquish their mission. But now came the time for the real fulfilment of that mission. As a religion of interest to the world, Judaism died in giving birth to Christianity; but in that very act she fulfilled her highest destiny. We should never forget that Christianity sprang from a Hebrew soil. The position of the Jews throughout the world also facilitated the extension of Christianity. The "dispersion" was everywhere. In the days of Augustus there were forty thousand Jews in Rome. By the time of Tiberius—*i.e.* when Christian missions were first started—this number appears to have been doubled. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Rome was the chief Jewish city in the world. Jews everywhere carried on their lucrative business of banking and money-lending; they almost monopolized the most important trade of Alexandria—the corn trade. At first Christianity was confounded with Judaism, and Christians enjoyed the protection which was accorded to Jews on account of the tribute they paid.

The Jews afforded a means of communication between Christian missionaries and the heathen world. The preacher of the gospel first went to the synagogue, which was to be

found in almost every town of the Roman empire. Here was a centre of work, and a point of reference and introduction. Jewish influence on Roman society has been greatly under-estimated. Speaking of the Israelites, the courtier and pagan philosopher, Seneca, says, "The vanquished have given laws to the victors." Proselytes to Judaism, especially among ladies, were both numerous and influential. We may read at the present day in old Jewish cemeteries epitaphs containing the celebrated names of the noble families of Rome. "Proselytes of the gate," as they were called, *i.e.* people who had rejected idolatry and adopted the spiritual monotheism of Israel and its moral law, without accepting circumcision and the ceremonial requirements of the Levitical system, were exceedingly numerous. They were just in the condition of men waiting for that fuller light which came with Christianity.

5. **State of religion.**—While the world was thus in a measure prepared for the gospel it was in direst need of that gospel. Great assiduity was still shown in performing the rites of pagan worship. Just when Christianity appeared an attempt was made to galvanize heathenism into more life by restoring neglected shrines and sacrifices. But inwardly it was dying. Men openly scoffed at its myths and legends. When the Emperor Claudius was deified, Seneca joked about his being translated "into the society of pumpkins." Cæsar coolly asserted in the senate, "Beyond this life there is no place for either trouble or joy;" and Cato the philosopher replied, "Beautifully and excellently has Caius Cæsar spoken in this assembly concerning life and death, esteeming as false those things which are related of the lower world." As "man is a religious animal," and craves for some spiritual exercise, if even the most monstrous, we see that when Rome ceased to care for her own religion she adopted all kinds of strange cults. "Gauls went about the streets—priests of the great goddess Cybele, now transferred to Rome.

Howling, and with dishevelled hair, they lashed themselves to blood with thongs, struck their sounding cymbals, and offered for a hundred eggs to ward off the diseases of Autumn. Priests of the Egyptian Isis were also there, in long linen robes, with the dog-mask before their faces, and their peculiar rattle in their hands. . . . All sorts of soothsayers were there—Chaldeans, astrologers, people pretending to possess Oriental wisdom. . . . The current waxed stronger and stronger until, a century later, Roman emperors themselves built sanctuaries for Isis and Serapis, side by side with the temples of Jupiter and Vesta; noble Roman ladies walked in the procession of Isis, shaking costly golden *sistra*, or, clad in linen robes and with bare feet, watched out the night in her temple to obtain expiation for their frivolous lives.”*

But, notwithstanding this busy religious eclecticism, a blank and barren atheism was settling down over the middle classes. Epicureanism was the popular philosophy, and Epicureanism was practical atheism. Stoicism aimed at a higher moral ideal, but though it flourished on the congenial soil of Rome as it had never flourished in its native land, it was always the philosophy only of the cultured and self-restraining few.

6. Moral Condition of the World.—Morally the condition of the world was inconceivably corrupt. Not only the gloomy historian Tacitus, who might be accused of prejudice on political grounds, and the bitter satirist Juvenal, who was perhaps naturally disposed to take an exaggerated view of evil things, but such an easy-going man of the world as Martial, and a frivolous popular novelist like Petronius, give us pictures of the times too awful to be described. Immorality was open, shameless, and monstrous. In the amphitheatre delicate ladies gloated over sights of blood, while trained gladiators wrestled in

* “The Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism,” by Dr. G. Uhlhorn (English translation), pp. 63, 65.

mortal combat; and lions, imported from Africa, were turned out to fight with men, or worse, to devour helpless convicts. Slavery counted its victims by the million. Gibbon tells us that the slaves equalled the free population in number. Blair, who has written a work on this subject, estimates them as three times more numerous. Robertson comes between these figures, and calculates two slaves to every free man. The condition of most of these slaves was deplorable. The lower class slaves worked during the day chained in gangs, and at night were crowded into damp, filthy dens, called *ergastula*, where they herded like wild beasts. Even the better class attendant was subject to ignominy and cruelty, and might be flung into the fishpond without a moment's warning if he had the misfortune to displease his master.

Free Romans lived in luxury, and the wealthy in incredible extravagance. But even in their case the pursuit of pleasure did not bring happiness. We find Seneca gravely advising suicide as the best escape from the misery of life. At another time, however, this philosopher expresses his desire for help in the perplexing doubts of that age of mental unrest. “Ah!” he says, “if one might only have a guide to truth.” When the world was thus casting off its old ways and turning wistfully in search of new ways, and while it was sunk in the deepest mire of immorality, and had the greatest need of some divine saving power, Christ came, and the gospel proclaimed the very grace for lack of which the corrupt nations were almost dying in despair.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST CENTURY: THE AGE OF THE APOSTLES.

Pentecost, A.D. 30—The protomartyr—Antioch—St. Paul's first mission, A.D. 46—The council at Jerusalem, A.D. 50—Later years of St. Paul—Martyrdom of James the Just—Nero, A.D. 54-68—His persecution at Rome, A.D. 64—Legends of St. Peter—Destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70—Domitian and his persecution, A.D. 81-96—St. John and the robber—Last days of the apostle—Labours of other apostles and spread of Christianity.

1. Pentecost, A.D. 30.—Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of Christianity. In His first advent the foundation was laid. His second advent is looked forward to as the occasion when He will appear as "the headstone of the corner" to complete and crown the spiritual temple. Therefore any account of Christianity which aims at tracing the course of it down from its source must begin with a description of the life and work of its founder. But it is obviously impossible to do justice to this supremely important subject within the space that could be allowed in so brief a sketch of three centuries of Christianity as that on which we are about to enter. Nor is it necessary to make the attempt. The wonderful story of Jesus of Nazareth stands by itself; it is familiar to us from the accounts of the four evangelists; and it may be regarded as sufficiently well known for the purpose of introduction to the history of His kingdom after His visible presence was removed from our earth.

We must cast about for another starting-point. One

plainly presents itself to us in the transactions of the great day of Pentecost (A.D. 30). Up till that day the new faith had won a very small group of adherents, who were far from appreciating its great destiny and their own important mission. The death of their Master had dismayed and paralyzed them. His resurrection, which had reawakened their joyous faith, had still left them in bewilderment and unpreparedness for action. On the day of Pentecost the first Christians commenced their great work, and Christianity began to emerge from obscurity, and to appear as a wonderful, new force in the world's history.

Two or three points of especial interest in regard to the right understanding of subsequent events should be carefully noted. (1) The cause of the change which came over the Christian community is ascribed to the descent of the Holy Spirit. And not only on that one occasion, but all through the apostolic age, we are constantly reminded that this secret but mighty influence was the root and spring of the growth and triumph of Christianity. A concrete and definite fact, however, was the ground on which this new subtle energy worked. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the fact to which the apostles appealed repeatedly as the fundamental truth of their teaching. (2) The character of Christianity as an aggressive and extending power in the world is at once made manifest. The apostles preach in the open air to all comers. No Gentiles are as yet addressed, but Jews from all quarters, Jews of all shades of character, Jews in all circumstances, Pharisees, Sadducees, publicans, rich and poor, virtuous and vicious, learned and ignorant, are all included in the gospel invitation. Thus we see the breadth of Christianity. It aims at establishing no narrow, jealous, exclusive, esoteric society. The gospel seed is sown broadcast, and all who believe are unhesitatingly baptized. (3) Preaching is the method by which the kingdom of

heaven is set up and extended. Christ said that His kingdom was not of this world, and He forbade His disciples to use force. We see them now commencing their great campaign. They are to conquer the world for their King. The weapons which they use are wholly spiritual. (4) The leading spirits in the great work are the apostles; they stand forth confessedly as witnesses of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Among the apostles St. Peter naturally assumes a sort of unofficial primacy. (5) The result of the preaching at Pentecost is an immense addition to the numbers of the Christian. To the little band of a hundred and twenty disciples at Jerusalem there is added at once a company of no less than three thousand new converts. Soon the number is raised to five thousand. And as many of these came from remote places, there can be no doubt that they would carry the gospel home with them, and in some cases become centres for spreading it among the Jews in their own neighbourhood. At Jerusalem the Christians at once realize the spirit of brotherhood in the fullest sense. They unite in a Church. The rich sell their possessions for the support of their poorer brethren.

2. **The Protomartyr.**—It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that, with all their gladness and brotherly love, the primitive Church at Jerusalem spent its time in a dream of idyllic delight. Rude shocks from the outer world repeatedly tried its fidelity. From the first the Sanhedrim, the great Jewish council, and in particular the Sadducees, regarded the Christian community with suspicion, alarm, and enmity. More than once the leading apostles were thrown into prison. At length the smouldering fires burst into a flame of persecution, which swept through the Church, and scattered its members in all directions. The immediate cause of this outbreak is attributed by St. Luke to the vigorous and original disputations of one very remarkable man. Stephen was one of

"the seven" who were appointed to look after the interests of the "Hellenists," or provincial Jewish Christians, who were living at Jerusalem. It is not his administrative functions, however, but his teaching, that brings him prominently before our notice. The brief glimpse that we have of him enchains our admiration for his transcendent ability, vigour, fervour, and courage. His name and office would lead us to suppose him to have been of foreign birth. In his teaching he appears to have taken a more pronounced and liberal platform than that of the apostles. He represents the broader Christianity, of which St. Paul, who probably attended his public disputations, subsequently became the champion. Indeed, he does so strikingly anticipate the teaching and spirit of his great successor, that we cannot but wonder what would have been his life-mission had he been called to serve Christ chiefly by living instead of by dying. In particular he seems to have denounced the slavish, superstitious localizing of worship which was associated with the temple services. So revolutionary a doctrine as that a universal spiritual worship was to supersede the venerable temple ritual could not fail to enrage the officials of the old *régime*. Stephen was arrested, and after a magnificent defence, which was in reality an unanswerable accusation against his enemies, stoned to death. This is the first Christian martyrdom. It has profound consequences. Christianity is proved to be more than a romance of Galilean peasants. What the cross revealed in the person of its Founder is seen in His followers. A tragic solemnity overshadows the new faith. Serious effects follow the death of the protomartyr. The sleuth-hounds have tasted blood. Their cruel thirst will not be soon allayed. Sharp and severe persecution harries the Christians. But out of it comes good to the cause that is dearer to them than their lives. For the scattered fugitives go forth as missionaries, and Christianity is spread far and wide. Isolated instances of good work in

outlying parts follow—such as St. Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian, which introduces Christianity into the far south, and St. Peter's mission to the centurion at Cæsarea, which opens the door to the Gentiles in the boldest possible way, by admitting an officer of the Roman army from the head-quarters of the government of Palestine. These instances are initial and typical of much quiet evangelizing of which we hear nothing. The gospel has begun to go forth conquering and to conquer.

3. **Antioch.**—On the Orontes, some twenty miles above its entrance into the Levant, just where the river breaks through the mountains at the abrupt meeting of the great chains of Lebanon and Taurus, stood the famous city of Antioch, the capital of Syria, and the most important metropolis of the East. Built partly upon a river-island, and partly on the neighbouring plain, and climbing up the heights of Mount Casius, surrounded by its vineyards and fruit trees, it was honoured with the names of "Antioch the Beautiful," "The Crown of the East." It had been a favourite residence of the Seleucid princes. After conquest by the Romans its splendour and luxury attracted many wealthy Italians. Its vast street, with colonnades running through the whole city, its magnificent palace, its temple of Jupiter flashing in burnished gold, its theatre, amphitheatre, aqueduct, and numerous baths, showed it to be a city of first rank. By means of the port at Seleuceia, with its spacious docks and quays, Antioch had communication with the whole Western world, and became a great centre of commerce. Its population was numbered by hundreds of thousands.

Here was planted the first Gentile Christian Church. The fact is very significant. Christianity is not to remain an obscure and provincial religion. By a magnificent ambition which is justified in its success, this religion, which sprung up among a handful of fishermen and peasants, daringly assails and plants its standard in all the

great centres of the world. As we follow the course of the apostolic missions we must be struck with the policy which directed them. One after another the leading cities of Asia and Europe are made the sites of Christian Churches. Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia; Thessalonica, one of the two capitals of Macedonia, and its most populous city; Corinth, the rich and luxurious capital of Achaia; Rome herself, and later Alexandria, become the homes of Christian Churches. Thus Christianity, which aims at being cosmopolitan, is metropolitan from the first.

The Church at Antioch soon springs into the most prominent position. She has more wealth than that at Jerusalem, and is able to show her gratitude by sending aid to the poor in the mother Church. Composed principally of Gentiles, and in a centre of varied influences, she is noted for her breadth and liberality, and becomes the head-quarters of the more advanced Christianity represented by her favourite apostle, Paul; while Jerusalem, under the superintendence of the devout James, is more narrow and conservative. But she is deserving of most note for her missionary work. From her the greatest Christian missions go forth, and to her the missionaries return with reports of their labours. Jerusalem still remains the centre of veneration in matters of sentiment; but for the serious work of the Church in evangelizing the world, Antioch has undoubtedly superseded her in energy and enterprise.

4. **St. Paul's First Mission, A.D. 46.**—It is to the honour of the Church at Antioch that, guided by the Divine Spirit, she had the courage to select the converted persecutor Saul, and solemnly ordain him, with others, as missionaries to the distant heathen. The ardent young Pharisee was marvellously fitted for his work. The world has never seen so perfect a blending of thought, culture, energy, and tender affectionateness in one character. The

mission commenced about the year A.D. 46. The first destination was Cyprus, where Barnabas, the senior missionary, had formerly been a landowner, and where, therefore, he would be in some degree known. After travelling the whole hundred miles along the island that separated Salamis from Paphos, and preaching in the Jewish synagogues by the way, the apostles obtained a convert in a very unexpected quarter. No less a personage than the Roman proconsul accepted the new faith. This man, Sergius Paulus, is commonly regarded as the first purely Gentile Christian. Cornelius and other Gentile converts appear to have known and believed the spiritual monotheism of Israel, while not entering the sacred community by circumcision. But Sergius Paulus was a heathen, who came right out of the pagan night into the truth of Christianity, without passing through the twilight of a semi-Judaism.

Crossing to the mainland, the missionaries landed at Perga, in Pamphylia. They at once set their faces towards the wild mountains behind the city. The passes were dangerous; flooded torrents had to be crossed; hordes of brigands infested the gloomy ravines. The heart of one of the party, John Mark, failed him, and he returned home. But the rest bravely penetrated the frowning fortress of rocks and carried their message to the upland cities beyond. Antioch, in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, were visited. A varied experience attended the mission. The rule was to commence with the Jews in the synagogue. But Gentiles were also welcome to the gospel. This broad liberalism roused Jewish jealousy. Following the missionaries to Lystra, the Jews roused the mob to such frenzy that they stoned Paul and left him for dead; his recovery was a surprise to his friends. Lystra was the scene of a curious incident. Astonished at a miracle, the simple inhabitants were about to offer sacrifices to Barnabas and Paul, taking them for Zeus and Hermes. This strange

event shows us that the old mythology still retained its hold in remote country places, however much it might be laughed at by the cultured and the cynical at Rome. Retracing their footsteps to strengthen and encourage the Churches they had founded, the missionaries returned to Antioch, and rehearsed the thrilling story of their adventures. The characteristic of this first regularly organized mission is its attempt to carry the gospel among the most ignorant, rustic heathen people. It was remarkably successful in the planting of Churches in outlying places. But its fame was soon to be eclipsed by larger missions in populous cities.

5. The Council at Jerusalem, A.D. 50.—Soon after the return of Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, the divergence of opinion between the liberal and conservative sections of the Christians threatened to come to an open rupture. Had it not been for the remarkable tact and the generous spirit of those who were at the head of affairs, there would have been a disastrous division of the Church into two opposed bodies, and the world would have had to make its acquaintance of the gospel perplexed by the mutual ex-communication of two competing versions of Christianity.

The dissension turned on the mission of St. Paul and the doctrine which he preached. It was natural that some amount of jealousy and suspicion on the part of the older disciples should be aroused by the brilliant career and daring innovations of one who had never been associated with the twelve in our Lord's lifetime. The jealousy and suspicion were heightened when the novel character of the new apostle's work and teaching were made manifest. The conduct of the recent mission to the heathen brought this out in startling colours. St. Paul had his own view of Christianity—what he called "My gospel." To the rigorous Jews of the school of St. James this appeared to be dangerously lax. Accordingly, some sound orthodox people of this class came down to Antioch, and greatly disturbed

the prosperous Church there by affirming the necessity of circumcision for Gentile as well as for Jewish Christians. This was a very serious assertion. It meant that the law of Moses was obligatory in its most fundamental point under the new dispensation, and it meant also that Gentiles must become Jews in order to be Christians—that Christianity was not a free world-wide spiritual religion, but only open to all the world on condition that all the world first yielded allegiance to Judaism. The claim for their own law must have struck Gentile Christians as an impudent assumption of superiority by the Jews; it would be fatal to all attempts at commending the gospel to the great Greek and Roman world. But in fairness to the Jews we should recollect that the prepossessions of their childhood, and their reverence for what to them was most sacred, inclined them to regard any apparent slight on the venerable statutes of Moses with the indignation of outraged loyalty.

The question had to be settled once for all. The Church at Antioch showed humility and a brotherly spirit in referring it to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. A deputation, the leading members of which were Paul and Barnabas, was sent up to Jerusalem. Two points needed to be decided—a personal one in regard to the apostleship of St. Paul, on whose authority the innovations of the broader gospel were introduced, and a doctrinal one, as to whether circumcision was obligatory on all Christians, Gentiles equally with Jews. The first point seems to have been considered privately. It was settled by a hearty and unreserved recognition of St. Paul's apostleship. "James and Cephas and John," "reputed to be pillars," gave to Paul and Barnabas "the right hands of fellowship." Nevertheless the difference of view between the apostles was wisely recognized, and to prevent any collision the mission field was divided, the older apostles taking the Jews and the newer the Gentiles. The second point was

considered in a public assembly. St. Peter, remembering his experience with Cornelius, advocated the liberal view. Paul and Barnabas followed with the logic of facts, rehearsing the story of their mission, which showed that God had bestowed the grace of the gospel on uncircumcised Gentiles. St. James took an intermediate position between the two opposed parties, and proposed a compromise, which was accepted by the meeting, and embodied in a letter to Antioch. Jewish Christians were still to observe circumcision. But so long as Gentiles kept those milder ordinances which were laid upon "proselytes of the gate," they need not be circumcised. This was virtually a victory for the liberal Christianity. The main point was the circumcision of Gentiles, and that point was distinctly yielded by the council.

Dr. Baur maintained that the schism went much further. He endeavoured to recast the whole history of primitive Christianity on the hypothesis that the party of St. Paul and the party of the other apostles stood opposed to one another in two violently hostile camps. This opinion was in direct opposition to the statements of the Acts of the Apostles. It was, therefore, only held by rejecting that book altogether. Without going into a discussion of the grave difficulties which any man who repudiates an authority the evidence for which is so strong must face, we may see an answer to the extravagant assertions of Dr. Baur in the undoubted writings of St. Paul himself. The German critic admitted that the Epistle to the Galatians was a genuine and authentic work of the apostle. In that Epistle St. Paul tells us how warmly he was welcomed as a brother apostle by the "pillars" of the Church (Gal. ii. 9, 10). On the other hand, it is impossible to read the Epistles of the various apostles without seeing that there must have been divergences of opinion among them. Preaching the same fundamental Gospel, they were wise enough to agree to differ where they could not see "eye to eye."

6. **Later Years of St. Paul.**—The subsequent years of the great apostle's life are too crowded with events to be followed in the present brief sketch—great missionary enterprises, visiting and writing to the infant Churches under his care, controversies with narrow-minded Judaizing enemies, and personal instruction and guidance of younger teachers, occupied his energies till the last. Starting from Antioch with Silas on his second missionary journey, the apostle revisited the Churches in Syria, Cilicia, and Lycaonia. Then, striking north, he broke up new ground. He preached to the dissolute Phrygians and the warm-hearted, fickle Celts of Galatia, who received him with such enthusiasm that they were ready to pluck out their own eyes and give them to him. Turning to the west, through Mysia, he came to the coast at Troas, from which place, as he looked across the blue waters, he would see the striking outline of Mount Athos, his first sight of Europe. Impressed by a vision, the missionaries crossed to Macedonia, and introduced the gospel to a new continent. They preached at the Roman colony of Philippi, and were scourged and imprisoned there; at the great city of Thessalonica, where the Jews raised a riot; at Berea, where they were at first better received, till emissaries from Thessalonica compelled them to move further south. At length the gospel was proclaimed at Athens, the university town and seat of dilettante learning; and at Corinth, the rich and luxurious capital of Achaia, one of the most important, though by no means the most spiritual, of the Churches, was founded. Here an attempt was made to bring the missionaries to trial before the courts of justice. But Gallio, a brother of the philosopher Seneca, was proconsul. He was a man of gentle manners and liberal views, and he refused to entertain the case. Well would it have been if the Roman government had always pursued the same wise policy in dealing with questions of religious controversy! From Corinth St. Paul returned by Ephesus and Cæsarea to

Jerusalem for the Pentecost, and thence to his head-quarters at Antioch. His third missionary journey was chiefly occupied in revisiting the Churches which he had founded in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. During this journey he made a considerable stay at Ephesus.

On his return to Jerusalem St. Paul was seen to be accompanied by an Ephesian Greek, Trophimus. Jewish enemies, who had followed him from Asia like blood-hounds, saw that their opportunity had come. They raised a cry that Paul had desecrated the temple by bringing this Greek with him into the sacred inclosure. The accusation was false. But behind it was the undoubted fact of the apostle's opposition to the old law. Once roused, the passions of the fanatical multitude could not be quieted. St. Paul was taken into custody first of all for his own protection; then, being formally indicted, he was imprisoned in the fortress at Cæsarea. Using his right as a Roman citizen of the free town of Tarsus, he appealed to Cæsar, and was sent to Rome to await his trial by the monster Nero. The account in the Acts breaks off abruptly, while the apostle is staying in his own hired house and preaching the gospel without hindrance. Some of his Epistles are evidently of later date, and describe the harsher treatment which he received towards the end of his life.

7. **Martyrdom of James the Just.**—While the Apostle Paul was waiting his end at Rome, a savage attack was made on the Christians in Judæa by their Jewish enemies. The onslaught began with the martyrdom of the venerable Bishop of Jerusalem, James the brother of the Lord, an apostle who was regarded with great reverence for the intense devoutness of his life, as well as for the high moral character which earned for him the title of "The Just." In his later years he was often to be seen alone in the temple, "making supplication for the forgiveness of the people." The Hebrew Christian Hegesippus, whose narrative is quoted in the history of Eusebius, gives us

a quaint and touching picture of the old man at his prayers, kneeling so constantly that his knees become hard like those of a camel. Jealous and alarmed at the growing influence of St. James, the scribes and Pharisees brought him up before the whole people at the Passover. "Persuade the multitude," they said, "not to be deceived in regard to Jesus." Then they took him to the temple. "Tell us," they said, "what is the door of Jesus?"—meaning, what is the way into the new religion? what is its teaching? "You ask me," answered James, "about Jesus, the Son of man. He is in heaven, at the right hand of the Almighty, and He will come in the clouds." At this magnificent confession the Christians shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Enraged by the failure of their attempt to terrify the apostle into apostasy, his enemies rushed upon him, flung him down the temple steps, and hurled stones at him while he knelt, still alive, and praying for their pardon, till a savage workman struck him dead with a fuller's tool.

The persecution spread through the towns and villages of Judæa. There is good reason to suppose that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written about this time, partly with the object of consoling the scattered Christians of Jerusalem, when they "went forth unto Christ without the camp, bearing His reproach," and confessing that "we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come."

8. Nero, A.D. 54-68.—At Rome Christianity first appears on the broad stage of the world's history. There is a letter which professes to be written by Pilate to Tiberius, giving an account of Jesus Christ, and a legend telling how the emperor proposed the admission of the God of the Christians to the Pantheon, but was hindered by the senate. The letter is manifestly a forgery, and the story quite incredible.

A more probable connection of the Roman government

with Christianity may be seen in an incident narrated by the Latin historian Suetonius. He says that the Emperor Claudius banished the Jews from Rome because of the commotions which were roused by "one Chrestus." It is at least possible, considering the common mis-spelling of the name "Christ" by pagan writers, that Suetonius has here an obscure allusion to one of those fierce quarrels which the question of the advent of the Messiah excited, and which reports brought back to Rome by pilgrims who had witnessed the great event of the day of Pentecost may have provoked.

But when we come to the time of Nero, the history of the relations of the emperor with the Christians is written in tragic letters of blood and fire. Nero succeeded his stepfather Claudius. His reign began with fair promises, under the wise guidance of Burrhus and the philosopher Seneca. The association of Seneca with Nero is one of the most mournful facts in history. It is impossible to find in all pagan literature writings of higher tone than the moral disquisitions of Nero's counsellor. Some have imagined that the philosopher must have had communication with St. Paul when that apostle was at Rome. The suggestion is highly improbable. It is not likely that the great courtier would condescend to visit a Jew prisoner. Neither once alludes to the other. The writings of Seneca, though wise and pure and lofty, are not inspired with the essential Pauline ideas of faith and grace. Nevertheless, the mere proposal of the hypothesis of a connection between the two greatest lights of the Christian and heathen world is a strong testimony to the character of Seneca as a teacher. But out of his books the great moralist bears a very different character. He could not restrain Nero from degenerating into the most frightful excesses; but he should have lifted up his voice against the downward course of his pupil, or at least he should have removed from the corrupt court, shaking off from his

feet the very dust of the place. Yet he lingered in the black den of murder and debauchery. As deed after deed of crime was added to the monstrous guilt of the depraved youth whom a mocking fate had set at the helm of the state, the grave philosopher stood by, silent and passive; if he did remonstrate, it was without making sufficient effort to attract any attention. No doubt, like Lot at Sodom, Seneca must have felt his righteous soul vexed at the foul sights that surrounded him. At length things became so bad that common decency compelled him to retire.

For this is what Nero was doing. Young Britannicus, the son of Claudius, only fourteen years old, who was growing in popular favour, roused Nero's jealousy, and the emperor contrived to poison him with shameful treachery. Octavia, the sister of the murdered boy, a young lady of twenty years, was married to Nero. Her husband first divorced her and then murdered her. His mother Agrippina was the instigator of his greatest wickedness. But Nero hated her power over him, and had her put to death. Though the horror of this most unnatural crime haunted the blood-stained emperor to his death, it did not stay his murderous career. He had dismissed Octavia in favour of Poppæa, whom he afterwards married. Poppæa he killed by brutally kicking her when in delicate health.

Nevertheless, the object of Nero's great ambition was a reputation for art and culture. He was proud of his voice. He would become sentimental over his music. He most shocked the aristocracy by the part he took in the circus, descending into the arena and acting as a charioteer in the races. This vain, dissolute, blood-stained youth was the first emperor to persecute the Christians. He was a fitting "Antichrist."

9. His Persecution at Rome, A.D. 64.—In the year A.D. 64 a great fire broke out in Rome. Every effort to extinguish the flames was unsuccessful, and they spread till two-thirds of the vast city were reduced

to ashes. It was rumoured that the emperor was the author of the conflagration. This is not likely, as Nero was at Ostia when it first appeared. However, he may have done something to extend it instead of suppressing it. He hastened back to Rome. Men said that he was to be seen admiring the spectacle, and reciting Homer's account of the burning of Troy. It was certainly the finest theatrical scene that had ever served for the amusement of the emperor, and he no doubt relished the grand sensation it afforded to his jaded æstheticism. Nero was considered bad enough for anything. So, whether true or false, the horrible report that the emperor had burnt down his own capital grew and obtained credence. Nero was alarmed. To save himself he sought to throw the blame elsewhere. He looked about for the most unpopular section of the community, in the hope that the people might be induced to glut their vengeance on their wretched neighbours. The Christians could not have been sufficiently known as yet to have had the definite charges brought against them which were formulated at a later date; but they were confounded with the Jews, and the Jews were aliens, disliked and despised—indeed the Christians, who were most active in making converts, inherited the chief weight of this Roman odium for the Jews. Accordingly, Nero selected the Christians for his scapegoats. We are not dependent on Church writers for this account of the reason for Nero's persecution of the Christians. It is the Roman historian Tacitus, impartially disliking both parties, who furnishes us with it. We cannot do better than read the narrative as it stands in his concise and graphic page. He says, "But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abomina-

tions, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius, at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty." (This must mean "guilty of being Christians," not "guilty of arson;" i.e. it must imply the faithful confession of Christ, or else it must refer to base informers who sought to escape a suspicion of Christianity by denouncing the true Christians.) "Upon their information an immense multitude was convicted, not so much for the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his garden for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer, or stood aloft on a car. Hence," adds the stern Tacitus, "even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed."

10. **Legends of St. Peter.**—It was probably during Nero's persecution that St. Paul was beheaded. Being a Roman citizen, he could not be crucified or tortured. St. Peter also seems to have suffered martyrdom at the same time. The question as to whether this apostle ever went to Rome has been hotly discussed. Of one thing there can be no doubt; St. Peter certainly held no position like that of the pope in later years. But there is so much

and so ancient evidence in favour of his having been martyred at Rome, that the balance of probability would strongly incline us to admit the fact, if no Protestant prejudices hindered; and it is weak and foolish to allow controversial prepossessions to bias our minds in regard to so innocent a question of fact. Some of the legends of the last days of the apostle are as beautiful as they are characteristic. His wife, it is said, was killed first. As she was being led to death, the apostle's last words to her were, "Remember thou the Lord." We are told that as St. Peter was fleeing from Rome along the Appian Way, Jesus Christ suddenly appeared before him. "Lord, whither goest Thou?" said Peter. The Lord replied, "I go to Rome to be crucified." Then the apostle recovered from his cowardice, went back to the city, and was crucified. Origen says that, too humble to suffer as his Master suffered, at his own request he was fixed to the cross with his head downwards; but the story has no early witnesses to support it, and it is too much like the extravagances of later ages to be credited of the grandly simple, unostentatious apostolic times. Caius the presbyter, who lived a hundred and fifty years later, tells us that he saw the tombs of the two apostles at Rome.

Nero's persecution was just a mad outbreak of diabolic wickedness on the part of the irresistible emperor. It does not seem to have been associated with any deliberate state policy. Frightful as were its ravages at Rome, it was apparently almost confined to the imperial city. Still the evil example of the head of the government would doubtless give encouragement to local fanaticism and private spite in other directions. Probably Antipas, the martyr of Pergamum, referred to in Rev. ii. 13, was killed at this time.

We may see the lurid reflections of the fierce flames of the great persecution at Rome in the Apocalypse. Nero appears there as a typical Antichrist. Rome is a new

Babylon, "drunken with the blood of the saints." The martyrs are seen before the throne of God, having come out of great tribulation, led by their Shepherd the Lamb to fountains of waters of life, while God wipes away every tear from their eyes.

On the 11th of June, A.D. 68, Nero finished his tale of slaughters by killing himself. The news was too good to be believed. There seemed to be something supernatural in his wickedness. People thought he could not be dead. Strange rumours were afloat. He was hiding, they said, and would reappear suddenly in the east. It was only as time wore on that men gradually permitted themselves to breathe freely, with the satisfaction of being truly rid of the monstrous tyrant.

11. Destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70.—The brief reigns of Nero's immediate successors, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, rapidly succeeded one another without affecting the comparatively peaceful condition of the Christians. A new and hopeful age dawned on the world with the accession of Vespasian, and was long famous as the prosperous "Flavian Era." A great revolution in the seat of power inaugurated it. Hitherto the senate and the aristocracy had furnished the world with its governors. But Vespasian belonged to the middle classes. He brought from his farm something of the simplicity and honesty which still lingered among the yeomanry of Italy. The popular emperor manifested no hostility to the growing sect of the Christians. But during his reign an event occurred which indirectly produced a profound effect on the course of the new religion.

Judea appears to have been regarded as a barren, worthless province, fit prey for the most corrupt governors; and a succession of vile men of broken character abused the power of Rome over the miserable people. We know something of Felix and Festus from the Acts. Albinus and Gessius Florus, who succeeded to the procuratorship,

indulged in wanton cruelty against their despised subjects. An insult to the synagogue at Cæsarea wrought the indignation of the Jews to boiling point. They broke out into rebellion. Thousands of them were slaughtered. In revenge, the people of Jerusalem massacred the Roman garrison, and Eleazar, son of the high priest, stopped the offering of sacrifices for the emperor. The fanaticism of the people was beyond bounds. It was necessary to take strong measures to suppress the revolt. Vespasian, then, a general in the army, was despatched to the scene. He subdued Galilee after a contest of much bloodshed. Before he could reach Jerusalem, his accession to the imperial purple summoned him to Rome. Titus, the new emperor's popular son, was then intrusted with the conduct of the war—a man of a mild and generous character. But the obstinate resistance of the Jews, provoking the passions of the Roman soldiery, rendered the siege of Jerusalem one of the most awful events in history. Internal factions divided the wretched inhabitants. Civil war strewn the streets of the besieged city with victims. Famine added its last horror to the infernal picture. Blood-curdling stories were told of how the primitive instincts of nature were uprooted, and women devoured their own children. Gaunt with hunger, mad with mutual hatred, fanatical in their hope that at the last moment the Messiah would appear, and God would interpose to save His favoured city, the Jews were at length overcome. The outer wall was broken down; the fortress of Antonia was taken; the final attack was concentrated on the temple. Titus vainly endeavoured to save the splendid building. But a soldier threw a firebrand into it; the sacred edifice soon caught fire; and on the 10th of August, A.D. 70, the visible centre and emblem of Judaism was reduced to a heap of smouldering ashes.

Strange omens are said to have preceded the disastrous siege. Josephus tells how some priests, going one night

during the Feast of Pentecost into the inner court of the temple, heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us depart hence." Before this a peasant named Jesus, the son of Ananias, went through the streets of the city, crying, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds against Jerusalem and the holy house." When scourged, to exorcise the demon by which men thought he was possessed, he only cried at each blow, "Woe, woe to Jerusalem." In the days of the siege he continued his miserable cry till killed by a stone from a Roman catapult.

Taking warning from the prophecies and advice of their Master, the Christians fled from Jerusalem at the commencement of the war, to the little city of Pella. They saw the folly of the hope of the advent of a warrior-Christ to save the doomed city, which inspired the fanaticism of its most ardent defenders. In their seclusion they heard of the awful fulfilment of the predictions of their Lord. After the sack of Jerusalem some of them returned to the city. But the old conservative Church of the Jews never resumed its former reactionary influence over the Christians in other places. Those who held most strongly to Judaistic Christianity broke off from the general body of Christians and became a distinct sect.

By the fall of Jerusalem a severe blow was given to the religious as well as the political pretensions of the Jews. Judaism was thus more decidedly severed from Christianity. The separation was twofold. (1) There was an internal separation in the faith of Christians, many of whom had hitherto clung too fondly to the rites and ceremonies of the law and the temple service, as the Epistle to the Hebrews plainly shows. (2) There was also a more visible external distinction between the Jews and the Christians. Out of the Jewish war Christianity emerges before the world as a new and distinct faith, though, as we shall see, it is still sometimes confounded with the older religion by superficial observers.

12. Domitian and his Persecution.—When Titus had succeeded his father Vespasian, and during most of the reign of his younger brother Domitian, who followed him in the purple, the Christians continued to live without interference from the government. It was a time of happy, earnest labour and progress in the Churches. Domitian began well by reforming the abuses which his amiable and indolent brother had not exerted himself to restrain. This very tendency to reform, however, boded ill to the Christians, though at first they were not disturbed. By a vigorous censorship the emperor tried to cure the corrupt morals of his people. His effort was as futile as that of the English Puritans in the seventeenth century. When it broke down, the vicious passions which had been curbed, not quenched, broke out into still more shameless excesses. Towards the end of his reign a new and evil spirit came over Domitian. He grew suspicious, timorous, morose, and cruel. With a contemptible meanness in motive and method, he terrorized Rome by the wanton slaughter of her leading citizens. It would seem that Christians are to be numbered among his victims. There is, however, no evidence of a deliberate and wholesale persecution of the Churches. Later writers compared the persecution of Domitian with that of Nero. But we have no record of any widespread massacre.

Some interest attaches to the case of Flavius Clemens, a man of consular rank and a cousin of the emperor. Dion Cassius tells us that he was executed for "atheism." We know that this crime was commonly charged against the Christians. It is with good reason, therefore, that Clemens and others who suffered on a similar accusation have been thought to be Christians. If so, we have an evidence that the gospel had reached to the very highest quarters; it was accepted by a relative of the emperor. Probably this persecution is part of the mistaken reformation carried on by Domitian. He would

purge the corrupt state from neglect of the gods as well as from other abuses.

Domitian's suspicious jealousy is illustrated by an incident which Hegesippus has recorded. The emperor heard that two grandchildren of Jude, the brother of the Lord, were still living. Learning that they were of the royal family of Judah, he was alarmed, and ordered them to be brought before him. He asked them if they were descendants of David, and they admitted that they were. He asked what was the value of their estate. They told him that it was only worth nine thousand *denarii*; and they showed their horny hands in proof that they were poor peasants cultivating their land themselves. The emperor inquired about the kingdom of Christ, and they told him that it was not of this world. Seeing that they were simple, harmless country folk, Domitian contemptuously dismissed them.

13. **St. John and the Robber.**—Some of the later scenes in the life of the Apostle John belong to the reign of Domitian. His exile in Patmos was probably soon after the time of Nero's persecution, and before the destruction of Jerusalem. It would appear that, after the death of St. Paul and St. Peter, St. John went to live at Ephesus. There, in the centre of the Churches of Asia Minor, for many years the old apostle exercised oversight over the Christians. According to Clement of Alexandria, he used to visit the Churches, preside at the election of bishops, and restore order when disturbances arose.

During one of his journeys he came to a town not far from Ephesus, where he was struck by the appearance of a young man. Turning to the bishop he said, "I commit that young man to thy charge, and call the Church and Jesus Christ to witness that I do so." The elder received the *protégé* into his own house, took him under instruction and baptized him. But, falling among bad companions, the young man was led into dissolute habits, and at last

committed theft, fled from the city and joined a band of robbers. Soon after this St. John returned to visit the Church. Addressing the bishop, he said, "Restore to me the trust which I and the Saviour committed to thee before the Church over which thou art overseer." The bishop did not at first understand. "I ask," said the apostle, "for the young man whose soul I intrusted to thee." "He is dead," said the bishop, with tears. "How dead?" "Dead to God; he fell away and was forced to fly for his crimes; he is now a robber among our mountains." The apostle rent his clothes, exclaiming, "What a guardian have I left over the soul of my brother!" He left the church, made his way to the mountains, and gave himself up to the robber-band. The young man recognized the apostle, and attempted to escape him. John ran after him, crying, "My son, why dost thou flee from me, thine own father, feeble and old? Pity me, my son; fear not. There is hope of life for thee. I will stand for thee before Christ. If necessary, I will gladly endure death for thee, as the Lord did for us. I will give my life for thine. Stay and believe. It is Christ that sent me." The young man listened with eyes cast down, flung away his weapons, and, bursting into tears, threw his arms about the old apostle and besought his forgiveness. John raised him up, prayed and fasted with him, and did not leave him till he had restored the wandering sheep to the fold of the Church. Surely one who could act thus was most fitted to preserve for us the account which he has given in his Gospel of the Good Shepherd.

14. **Last Days of the Apostle.**—St. Jerome has recorded a beautiful and simple legend of the last days of the aged apostle. When in extreme old age, and no longer able to preach, St. John would be carried into the assemblies of the Christians, and would simply utter the words, "Little children, love one another." They asked him why he always came with the same message. He answered, "It is

the Lord's commandment, and when it is fulfilled nothing is wanting."

St. John appears to have outlived the first century of our era. He thus formed an important connecting-link between the days of our Lord and the time of Trajan. His connection with Ignatius and with Irenæus, through Papius, brings us a continuous chain of testimony right down from apostolic times. His end was probably by a natural death.

15. Labours of other Apostles and Spread of Christianity.—The accounts of the labours of the other apostles which have come down to us are very unreliable. It became the habit of later ages to look at the work of the apostles through the magnifying glass of reverence for their authority. Every mission was ascribed to an apostle. Every field of labour was regarded as under apostolic direction. But we know from the Acts that a great amount of evangelistic effort was carried on by private Christians. Still it is only reasonable to suppose that the apostles did much work which is not recorded in the New Testament.

After the council of Jerusalem the apostles were dispersed. James, however, remained in charge of the Church in that city till his martyrdom. The Epistle of Jude showed that he was actively concerned with the work of the Gospel—possibly in the neighbourhood of Ephesus, as his reference to heresies which sprang up there have led some to suppose. According to Church legends, Matthew carries the gospel into Arabia, and is followed there by Bartholomew; Andrew labours in Cappadocia, Galatia and Bithynia; Philip in Phrygia; James the son of Alphaeus in Egypt; Matthias in Ethiopia; Simon Zelotes in Mauritania and Libya; Judas Thaddæus in Mesopotamia, taking the city of Edessa for his centre; Thomas in Parthia. The prolific legendary lore of the marvellous doings and cruel martyrdom of the apostles is too baseless to merit any quotation.

It is more important to note the undoubted spread of the gospel during the first century. The Acts shows us how it was preached by St. Paul in Syria, in Asia Minor, in Greece, in Rome, as far towards the north-east as Galatia, and as far towards the north-west as Illyricum. The Apocalypse shows us how Christianity had taken hold of cities in Asia not evangelized by St. Paul—Smyrna, Philadelphia, Thyatira, and the old royal and learned city of Pergamos. There is good reason to believe that it was soon introduced to Alexandria—probably, according to a very old account, by the Evangelist Mark. There was a Church at Babylon in very early times, where the Jewish colony was numerous and wealthy. Though we have but scanty reliable records of the progress of Christianity during the last thirty years of the first century, the number of Christians in Bithynia and other parts of Asia, in Rome and its neighbourhood, in Africa and elsewhere, early in the following century, is ample evidence that this quiet time was alive with earnest and fruitful missionary enterprises.

CHAPTER II.

FROM TRAJAN TO COMMODUS.

Prosperous condition of the Roman world—Trouble to the Christians—Causes of persecution—Trajan, A.D. 98–117—Correspondence with Pliny—Martyrdom of Ignatius, A.D. 107—Hadrian, A.D. 117–138—Insurrection of Barcochebas, A.D. 131—Antoninus Pius, A.D. 139–161—Justin Martyr's "Apology"—Marcus Aurelius, A.D. 161–180—His treatment of the Christians—How he came to be a persecutor—Polycarp—The martyrs of Gaul—The story of Blandina—"The Thundering Legion"—Commodus and Marcia, A.D. 180–192—The progress of Christianity during the second century.

1. Prosperous Condition of the Roman World.—The Roman world enjoyed a long time of remarkable quiet and prosperity from the later years of the first century after Christ till far down in the second. In place of voluptuous murderers, such as Nero and Domitian, five good emperors in succession administered the government with a careful regard for the welfare of their subjects, viz. Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines. Not that the peace was never broken, for Trajan greedily plunged into wars of distant conquest, and Marcus Aurelius was reluctantly forced into wars of self-defence. But warfare was almost confined to outlying regions. At home, *i.e.* for all the countries situated round the Mediterranean Sea, it was an age of rest and progress. For the first time in the history of the world, as Gibbon tells us, it was safe for a man to travel alone and unarmed from Asia to Spain.

2. Trouble to the Christians.—But this era of quiet happiness for most people was one of conflict and distress for the Christians. It was the heroic age of the Church, when martyrdom was most noble and confession of faith most simple and lofty. Christianity, emerging out of the obscurity in which it had hitherto received comparative neglect as an insignificant Oriental religion scarcely distinguished from Judaism, stood face to face with the great evil powers of the world, confronted by the gloomy fanaticism of paganism and the cruel majesty of imperialism.

Most old Church histories contain references to what used to be called "The Ten Persecutions." The number, however, must have been fixed quite arbitrarily. The persecutions cannot be distinctly enumerated. Regarded from the standpoint of the Roman magistrate, Christianity could never have been other than illegal. From the days of Trajan it was expressly proscribed, and its followers threatened with punishment. Though the rescript which gave the new religion this criminal character in the eye of the law was not uniformly put in force, it remained unrepealed during the reigns of successive emperors, and could be revived in the quietest times. The Christian was always in peril. At intervals the smouldering fires, which were never extinguished, burst out into a conflagration of more or less serious extent.

3. Causes of Persecution.—The question why the better emperors persecuted the Christians is important for a right understanding of the history of the early Church. At first sight it has seemed strange to some that a government so magnanimous and liberal in regard to the religious practices of subject races as that of Rome, should make a glaring exception to its policy of indifference and comprehension when dealing with one religion. But a little inquiry will explain the case, and will show us that the persecution of the Christians can not only be accounted for; it was inevitable. Two points should be carefully con-

sidered—the political justification of the persecution, and the motives that prompted it.

(1) *The political justification of the persecution of the Christians.* The Christian religion received a different treatment from other religions because it was essentially different in nature and operation. Rome permitted each nation to enjoy its own indigenous religion, but she forbade the importing of foreign religions into the imperial city. There were many exceptions to this rule, notably in the case of the Jews; and therefore Christianity enjoyed a comparative immunity while confounded with Judaism, which she lost when clearly distinguished from the older faith. The missionary zeal of Christianity was most offensive to Roman principles of conservatism. Then it must be remembered, in fairness to the emperors, that Christianity was the first aggressor. The old order was really acting in self-defence when it attacked the new faith. The Christians assailed the heathen religions, not with "carnal weapons," but with ridicule, scorn, and denunciation. The old cults were believed by their followers to be all equally true. They could, therefore, be content to live peaceably side by side. The worshipper of Zeus had no quarrel with the devotee of Osiris. But Christianity was exclusive, and would brook no rival. This aggressive character of Christianity was a second reason for opposing it in the interests of order. Then the constitution of Christian Churches rendered them liable to the charge of being secret societies. All similar guilds—with the exception of specially licensed burial clubs—were contrary to law. But the gravest charge against the Christians was that of disloyalty. There was one universal religion throughout the empire—the worship of the emperor as a god. Heathen subjects would find little difficulty in showing their obsequious devotions by adding one more deity to their numerous pantheon. But Christians positively declined to take part in this gross, blasphemous

profanity. Their refusal was interpreted as rebellion. The offence of rejecting the state religion became the crime of treason. "This is the reason, then," says Tertullian, "why Christians are counted public enemies; that they pay no vain, nor false, nor foolish honours to the emperor." Moreover, heathen rites were bound up with minor state regulations, and the sensitive conscience of the Christians often made them take up a position of apparent disaffection in order to escape the contamination of these rites.

(2) *The motives which prompted the persecution of Christians.* The first persecutions, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, sprang from Jewish jealousy, which roused Gentile prejudice and passion. Even that early record gives us instances of heathen opposition from interested motives, as in the case of the silversmiths of Ephesus, who justly feared that the progress of the gospel would be bad for their trade. From the emperor, who was *Pontifex Maximus*, down to the lowest of the people, a very great number of persons were professionally and commercially interested in image-making, in providing sacrifices, in ministering at the shrines, etc. Christianity attacked this large and complex "interest," and thereby roused its fierce hatred. Then, though faith in the old religions was decaying, it was still very powerful, especially in the country districts and among the more ignorant. Hearing their gods denounced, faithful pagans regarded the offending Christians as "atheists," and experienced the horror which is associated with that name of opprobrium. Perhaps some found it easy to condone their own laxity of devotion by zealously attacking what they regarded as their neighbours' impiety. It is true that the Christians were not the only people who rejected the popular mythology. Many of the philosophers and satirists did so, and generally with impunity. But while attacking the doctrine, these writers spared the ritual of heathenism.

Epicureans, who believed in no God, would sacrifice before the shrine of every god. Now, there never was a religion at once so regardless of creeds and so jealous of ceremonies as that of imperial Rome. Consequently so long as he duly observed the requisite rights, the scoffer would be free to treat the doctrine as he pleased. But the Christians shunned the public altars, and rejected the whole religion of paganism. They were suspected of causing calamities, floods, and earthquakes; through the anger of the gods which this neglect aroused.

Then, the Christians were considered to be morose, unsocial, and offensive in their separation from the amusements and common habits of the community. Almost every act of pleasure, of social intercourse, of business, of politics, was interwoven with idolatrous observances; and therefore, however willing they might be to mix with their fellows—and there were no monks in those days—the Christians were constantly forced to abstain from all kinds of public and private affairs in order to avoid participation in heathen rites.

There can be no doubt that the prevalent belief of the Christians in the approaching end of the world was misunderstood by their contemporaries, and regarded as a wish for the destruction of the human race, and a wish which some thought might be executed by means of magic; for it was whispered that there was something very uncanny about the midnight meetings of these strange people. Thus, by a painful irony of circumstances, the men who were inspired by the enthusiasm of humanity, which was breathed into them by the "Son of man," were regarded as pre-eminently *misanthropes*. Horrible calumnies furthered this unpopularity of a suspected class. Jews had diligently spread a rumour that the *Agape*, or "Love-feast," which the Christians held at midnight with closed doors was an occasion for cannibal orgies and immoral license! With such prejudices afloat—though

this latter rumour was soon lived down—who can be surprised that even so sensible a sovereign as Trajan, or so good a one as Marcus Aurelius, should have disliked and even persecuted men who appeared to their generation in much the same light as Russian Nihilists and members of a Fenian Brotherhood do to ours? Nevertheless, they made a grievous mistake. From their own point of view their action was an error. They under-estimated, or rather quite failed to recognize, the mysterious spiritual power which all the legions of Rome could not master. They did not crush Christianity. It is to this period that Tertullian's famous saying is applied, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." But Rome made a greater mistake, in not seeing that the new religion which she thought to destroy as a very cankerworm of society was the one remedy which was destined to save the decaying world from utter corruption.

Let us now take a rapid glance over the successive events of the Christian history of this period.

4. **Trajan, A.D. 98–117.**—Calm, judicious, affable, and perhaps indolent with age and self-indulgence, the stately Nerva reversed the cruel edicts of Domitian, and permitted the world to breathe freely under his kindly, if somewhat weak, rule. The Christians came in for their share of the general tranquillity, and for a short interval enjoyed immunity from persecution.

Trajan (A.D. 98–117) was a man of a very different stamp from his predecessor. A soldier, energetic and vigorous, strongly impressed with the necessity of preserving the military discipline of the empire, he was not likely to disregard the apparent insubordination of a troublesome sect. Instead of being surprised at his sanctioning the persecution of Christians, we should rather be struck with the mildness of his treatment of them.

5. **Correspondence with Pliny.**—An interesting circumstance led to the expression of the emperor's wishes

in this matter. Pliny the Younger was governor of Bithynia. His ambition was literary rather than political, and he showed the indecision in action which is the besetting weakness of men of too refined culture, for he was in the habit of referring innumerable questions to the emperor, and incurred a gentle rebuke from his master for not acting more on his own responsibility. In one of his letters he asked how he was to treat persons charged with being Christians. Bithynia had been one of the most fruitful fields of apostolic missions, and in Pliny's time the number of Christians in that province greatly perplexed the governor. Many were terrified into apostasy. Pliny told Trajan that these people declared their offence to be summed up in this: "That they met on a stated day before daybreak, addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for any wicked purpose, but never to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, never to break their word, or deny a trust when called on to deliver it up: after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble, and to eat together a harmless meal." Pliny says that they desisted from meeting after he proclaimed an imperial edict which forbade all such assemblies. He adds that he tortured two female slaves, but could only discover evidence of "an absurd and extravagant superstition."

Trajan's reply is favourable to the Christians on three points: (1) Pliny is not to seek out Christians, but only to try those who are brought before him. (2) Anonymous information is not to be received. (3) Persons who renounce Christianity are to be pardoned. But an important direction of this rescript is seriously inimical to the Christians. The mere profession of Christianity, without any added charges, is to be treated as an offence and punished.

Nero's savage slaughter of the Christians was a sudden spasmodic act of fury, which died away as abruptly as it

arose. It formed no part of the grave policy of the empire. The same is true of Domitian's reckless persecutions. But after the sending of Trajan's letter to Pliny, a new state of affairs characterized the relation of the government to Christianity. Trajan therein distinctly sanctioned the trial, condemnation, and punishment of Christians simply on account of their religion. Hitherto, if Christians had been attacked, it had been for alleged crimes; now the mere fact of their being Christians, irrespective of any other charge, was declared to be sufficient for condemnation. Before this, Christianity was illegal only by inference; now it became so by express declaration. If Christians had suffered before, it was owing to the malice of individuals; the Roman magistrates had generally observed an attitude of comparative impartiality, and had sometimes shielded the persecuted from the violence of the mob. But from the time of Trajan it became the duty of a magistrate to treat a Christian as a criminal convicted of offending against the law, however averse to persecution he might feel on personal grounds.

6. Martyrdom of Ignatius, A.D. 107.—Even before this rescript was issued, Trajan's severe decree against secret societies—he was so jealous of such societies that he actually forbade the formation of fire-brigades—led to an outbreak of persecution in the East, during which one of the most illustrious of the martyrs suffered death (A.D. 107).^{*} Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, is supposed, according to old Church legends, to have been the child whom Christ set before His disciples as a typical citizen of the kingdom of heaven. However that may be, Ignatius is described on good authority as "the disciple of John the apostle, a man in all respects of apostolic character." He was impetuous, and we might almost call him chivalrous

^{*} There is, however, some doubt as to the date of the martyrdom of Ignatius, which those who deny Trajan's having made two expeditions against the Parthians fix at A.D. 116.

in his martyr-spirit. Under the great excitement of the times he seems to have shown an unjustifiable eagerness not to escape torture and death. Yet who can blame him, after seeing the passionate devotion to Christ that inspired and inflamed his whole soul? In the days of Domitian Ignatius held his ground bravely in face of persecution, only anxious to save from falling any who were deficient in courage. It is said that when Trajan entered Antioch in his first expedition against the Parthians, the aged bishop voluntarily presented himself before the emperor. Having bravely confessed Christ, he was ordered to Rome, to die in fighting wild beasts in the amphitheatre. The letters which he wrote during the journey (the three genuine letters—several spurious letters were ascribed to Ignatius) reveal a fiery spirit of devotion sometimes rising to rhapsody. Describing his guard, he says, "I have already begun to fight with wild beasts; from Syria to Rome, across sea and land, I was chained to ten leopards whom kindness only rendered more cruel." Yet this harsh treatment did not quench his indomitable ardour. In the passion of devotion to his Master which so beautifully characterizes Ignatius, he cries, "Welcome nails and cross, welcome broken bones, violence of fierce beasts, wounded limbs and bruised body; welcome all diabolic torture, if I may but obtain Jesus Christ." When nearing Rome, he writes, "I think of many things in God; but I keep myself in subjection lest I should yield to pride. It is a moment in which to tremble, lest I should be exalted above measure." "I crave for no mortal food; I desire no earthly pleasure. I seek the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ, and I seek his blood, a drink which is love incorruptible." The details of the death of Ignatius are lost in obscurity, but we may be sure that his end was worthy of the strange fervour of love to Christ which converted a march to execution into a triumphal procession.

The persecution, which was chiefly centred in Asia

Minor, spread into other provinces, and Simon, the son of Cleophas, who next after James presided over the Church at Jerusalem, was crucified.

7. Hadrian, A.D. 117-138.—Hadrian, the successor of Trajan (A.D. 117-138), relinquished the dangerous conquests of the warrior-emperor, and devoted his attention to embellishing his cities with splendid edifices, and generally increasing the grandeur and display within the old limits of the empire. He was pacific, magnanimous, and luxurious. A foolish tradition, quite unworthy of credence, asserts that the unfinished temples, built by Hadrian, to which no name was attached, were intended for Christian places of worship. There is not the slightest reason to suppose that the emperor could have thus patronized a detested and despised religion. But he was willing to protect the Christians from accusations of mere calumny and spite; and when the hatred of the mob led to turbulent proceedings, he ordered these to be quelled. In reply to representations from Serrenius Graninaus, the proconsul of Asia Minor, Hadrian sent a despatch to his successor, Minucius Fundanus, forbidding calumnious accusations and tumultuous violence against the Christians.

The first writings in defence of Christianity, the apologies of Quadratus and Aristides, two learned Greeks, were presented to Hadrian during his progress through Greece, when about to be initiated in Hellenic mysteries (A.D. 124), and may have contributed to the amelioration of the condition of the persecuted Churches.

8. Insurrection of Barcochebas, A.D. 131.—But while the emperor regarded the Christians with comparative favour, a terrible storm from another quarter burst over their heads. Hadrian built a city on the site of Jerusalem, which had been so completely destroyed after the great siege that the very ground on which it stood had been ploughed up. No Jew was admitted to the new city. It was not even called Jerusalem, but *Elia Capitolina*,

after the emperor. This last insult roused the Jews to madness. Since the year A.D. 115 they had been incessantly stirring up revolts. Now they were goaded into fierce insurrection. First came the Rabbi Akiba, the prophet of revived nationalism, and then Barcochebas (the Son of the Star), the giant hero who was solemnly girded with the sword of Jehovah by the venerable rabbi. Barcochebas was no Messiah; he was no Judas Maccabæus; for a short time he stood at the head of a fierce fanatical host, and then he fell beneath the stern retribution of the Roman legionaries (A.D. 132). The leader perished in battle at the siege of Bether; after the siege ten of the most learned rabbis were put to death, Akiba, the last of them, torn in pieces with red-hot pincers, confessing in his death-throes the great creed of Judaism, "God is one." The Jews who were killed in these revolts are computed by hundreds of thousands. But the transitory gleam of success with which the insurrection opened was fatal to the Christians of the neighbourhood. Because they refused to recognize Barcochebas and join his forces, great numbers of them were mercilessly butchered by his followers.

This insurrection and the defeat of it had another effect upon the Churches. Christianity had been often confounded with Judaism; but henceforth the two stood clearly opposed and separate in the eyes of the world.

9. **Antoninus Pius, A.D. 138-161.**—We have now arrived at the time of the Antonines. Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, the two Antonines, governed the empire for forty-two years (A.D. 138-180) with the sole view of promoting the welfare of their people. The world had never seen better princes, nor ever enjoyed greater prosperity. Antoninus Pius, the first of the Antonines, was adopted by Hadrian, and when the old emperor was suffering from the agonies of a fearful and incurable disease, showed great wisdom and patience in allaying the

irritability of the sufferer. At last, worn out by agony, Hadrian died, and Antoninus entered upon the supreme power (A.D. 138). He was a man of singular purity and gentleness. At the same time he was remarkable for practical wisdom and energetic activity. It is also recorded of him that he was a happy man. The latest historian of this period, M. Rénan, describes him as "the most perfect sovereign who has ever reigned."

The Christians enjoyed a time of peace under this good ruler. He even took steps for the protection of them, and wrote to the magistrates of those Greek cities in which tumults had arisen, directing that no new measures should be taken against the Christians.

Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian, attributes to Antoninus Pius a decree which contains the highest praise of the Christians, and the most stern denunciation of their enemies. But this document is evidently a forgery. The emperor must have been a Christian himself to have adopted the language it contains.

We must bear in mind the fact that though persecution slumbered, the rescript of Trajan was not rescinded. It lay in abeyance, but it could be revived at any time. Christianity was not legalized. It was still criminal in the eyes of the law.

10. **Justin Martyr's "Apology."**—Justin Martyr was the great advocate of Christianity at this time, and he was well suited to his task. In his early days he had sought light and rest in philosophy, but in vain. The gospel then gave to him what he failed to find in Paganism. His wide culture, philosophic sympathies, and eloquent style, added to his Christian faith and zeal, enabled him to address the heathen world with force and wisdom. Justin presented his first and great "Apology" to Antoninus Pius. It does not come within our scope to consider here the theological characteristics of the writings of Justin Martyr. But his defence of Christianity bears on the

external history of the Church, which is the subject with which we are more immediately concerned. It is interesting to note the attitude of Justin in approaching the emperor. This is respectful, but at the same time independent, courageous, and dignified. There is no cringing before the imperial power, and no shamefacedness in the confession of Christ. The flattery which disgraces the address to King James in the preface of our Bibles can find no parallel in the early Christian addresses to majesty.

Justin enables us to see clearly what were the charges commonly brought against the Christians. He quotes and refutes three, viz. (1) atheism, (2) rebellion, (3) immorality.

11. Marcus Aurelius, A.D. 161-180.—Marcus Aurelius was associated in the affairs of state with Antoninus Pius from very early years; for Hadrian adopted the elder Antonine on condition that he, in turn, would adopt the younger. When only eight years old, "the sweet, melancholy child attracted the aged emperor's attention by his good nature, his docility, and his inability to tell a lie." While still a boy he put on the plain, coarse robe of a philosopher, and began to practice the stoical austerities with so much vigour that his mother had to interfere to save his health. Such a lad must have presented a strange appearance in the gay court of Hadrian. During the reign of Antoninus Pius he conscientiously attended to public business, though his natural leaning was to meditative retirement; and thus he fitted himself for the heavy responsibilities of government which devolved upon him on the death of the good Antoninus (A.D. 161).

In two respects Marcus Aurelius was not quite equal to his predecessor. He lacked the cheerfulness that was so pleasantly characteristic of the first Antonine. A strange sadness pervades his life and breathes through his writings—a sadness that deepens into inward martyrdom towards his later days. He also lacked the energy of Antoninus Pius.

But he was too conscientious to be indolent. And so we find him constantly urging himself on with a stern sense of duty to what a man who was naturally more active would have done with spontaneous delight.

Marcus Aurelius has revealed to us the secrets of his inner life in his "Meditations." This book contains the private reflections of the emperor noted down at casual moments snatched from the pressure of business. We see him sitting at night in the solitude of his tent, when with the army on the banks of the Danube, calling himself to account for his conduct during the day. Indeed, Marcus Aurelius carried the discipline of self-examination to the extreme of morbid scrupulousness. Yet it is impossible not to be struck with the lofty principle which actuated this pagan emperor in governing himself, and the gentle, patient charity with which he treated other men. He was universally loved. When he died the world mourned. People lamented him, according to their ages, as "Marcus, my father!" "Marcus, my brother!" "Marcus, my son!"

12. His Treatment of the Christians.—The most painful and disappointing page in all history (after that which tells of Him who came to His own, and His own received Him not) is the page which records the relations of Marcus Aurelius to the Christians. Few professedly Christian sovereigns, though bearing the proud title of "Defender of the Faith," can compare in character and conduct with the philosophic Emperor of Rome. In regard to the violent suppression of opinion, Marcus Aurelius expresses views which have scarcely been reached in our own day. Thus he writes, "Who can change men's opinions? And without a change of opinions, what else is there than the slavery of men who groan while they pretend to obey?" ("Meditations," ix. 22). And again, "How cruel it is not to allow men to strive after the things which appear to them to be suitable to their nature and profitable! And yet in a manner thou dost not do

this, when thou art vexed because they do wrong. For they are certainly moved towards things because they suppose them to be suitable to their nature and profitable. But it is not so? Teach them, then, and show them without being angry" ("Meditations," vi. 27). Surely, it might be thought, so good a man, owing to such liberal sentiments, if he did not regard Christianity with sympathy, would at least leave it in peace. It must be with a shock of surprise and horror that any one will hear for the first time that Marcus Aurelius persecuted the Christians with a severity before unknown. The fierce outburst of Nero's passion, and the spasmodic cruelties of Domitian, do not approach the systematic prosecutions and wholesale tortures which this philosopher and saint deliberately sanctioned. It is not enough to plead that the general illegality of Christianity, as an unauthorized religion, was still unaltered, or that Trajan's rescript was not repealed. For Marcus Aurelius did not content himself with permitting these old measures against Christianity to be put in force. He took a new step on his own account. He issued an edict which Melito of Sardis describes as such as should not have been put in force against the most barbarous enemies, Trajan, though sanctioning the condemnation of Christians when brought before the courts of justice, distinctly forbade any search to be made for them. But Marcus ordered them to be sought out and brought up for trial. He even seems to have made use of the odious evidence of spies. Not forbidding it, he is responsible for the most harrowing tortures to which Christians were subjected.

13. **How he came to be a Persecutor.**—Why did Marcus Aurelius persecute the Christians? In endeavouring to answer this question, we must first of all call to mind the general reasons for the persecution of Christianity by the Roman government (see page 35). It is an evidence of the growth of the Church that the Christian question had now become one of imperial interest.

Hitherto it had been treated only accidentally, as circumstances brought it up, and with contemptuous unconcern. It might well be that a body of people who could be allowed to live in obscurity when but small should be regarded with alarm when they had grown into commanding numbers. Marcus Aurelius was evidently alarmed at the growth of Christianity.

In justice to the emperor we must see that he never really knew Christianity. In his writings he only once alluded to the Christians, and then in a way which showed how totally ignorant he was of the motives of fidelity which inspired the heroism of the martyrs. In the one passage referring to them, he contrasts the "mere obstinacy" which he supposes to characterize the Christians when they face death, with the reasonableness and dignity of a philosopher's resignation to death. He is disgusted at what he calls the "tragic show" of Christian martyrdom. A spirit like that of Ignatius would certainly be unintelligible and offensive to the calm and dignified stoic emperor. What he did, he did ignorantly. But had he tried to understand the Christians better, he must have failed; for they lived in an entirely different world from his. Stoicism, which was pagan Phariseeism, could never stoop to understand the humility of a religion the type of which was a little child.

Moreover, though a philosopher, Marcus Aurelius was a devout pagan worshipper at the shrines of the old gods. He reinstated neglected ceremonies, and bestirred himself to provide sacrifices for altars whose fires had been permitted to cool by less assiduous devotees. There was a deep vein of superstition in the emperor's character. He was a philosopher in conduct, which is very different from being a scientific man in speculation. The association of Christian insults to the local deities with earthquakes, floods, and plagues would strike such a man with concern. Then, finding the popular fury also roused by these

calamities, Marcus Aurelius was prepared to sympathize with it sufficiently to permit it to take effect against the men who appeared to be pests of society.

We must not suppose that Marcus Aurelius showed any evil passion in persecuting Christians. What he did must have been done calmly and deliberately, for such as appeared to him to be valid reasons. This action would not contradict his expressed opinions regarding liberty of thought. To the Roman, religion was a matter of ritual, not of creed. A man might think as he liked, provided only that he sacrificed at the public altars, or at least offered no overt insult to the popular ceremonies. It was not in order to change the opinions of the Christian, but to restrain what he regarded as their dangerous conduct, that Marcus Aurelius visited them with heavy punishments.

The treatment of the Christians by this good and noble man is a standing warning to all ages. How difficult it is to enter into the character of those from whom we are widely separated in sympathy! How wrong to judge them! How disastrous to coerce them!

14. Polycarp.—One of the first to suffer was Justin Martyr. He was killed at Rome, A.D. 166. In the East there occurred—probably about the same time, but the date is a matter of dispute—the martyrdom of a man who had almost earned the reverence due to an apostle. Polycarp is one of the most interesting characters in the history of the early Church. He forms a connecting link between the age of the apostles and that with which we are now concerned. In his younger days he was a disciple of the Apostle John, and intimately acquainted with his master; and in his old age he was well known to Irenæus. Now Irenæus is a familiar figure in history. His writings have been preserved, and the part he took in the troubles of his time fully narrated. Thus, by means of his long life, Polycarp seems to bring the reader of history into the

very presence of the “beloved disciple.” Irenæus writes: “I could point out the spot where the blessed Polycarp sat to teach. I could describe his gait, his countenance, all his habit, even the clothes he used to wear. I could repeat the discourses which he delivered to the people, and recall all that he said of his intimacy with John, and the narratives he used to relate about those who had seen the Lord upon earth. His memory was constantly dwelling on that which they had told him of the words, the miracles, the doctrine of Christ.”

This venerable man was still living, and holding the office of bishop at Smyrna, one of St. John’s “Seven Churches,” when the persecution broke out in Asia Minor, and he was chosen as the chief victim. An awful shout went up from the enraged multitude, “Away with the atheists! let Polycarp be sought out!” The old man knew what that cry meant, but he heard it with undisturbed equanimity, and at first resolved to remain in the city. Urged by many to escape, he complied, and showed the reasonable spirit commanded by Christ and exemplified by the apostles, which contrasts favourably with the almost fanatical thirst for martyrdom of Ignatius. At first he stayed with a few friends in a country house near to Smyrna, spending day and night in prayer for all men and for the Churches throughout the world. When his pursuers were at hand, he took refuge in another dwelling. But he was betrayed by a slave under torture. Taking the lad with them and an escort of horsemen, the pursuers set out one Friday evening about supper-time. They found Polycarp lying in the upper room of the little house where he had last found shelter. As they approached, he gave up all idea of further flight, saying, “The will of God be done.” Then he went down and spoke to them. He immediately ordered food and drink to be set before them, as much as they cared for, and besought them to allow him an hour for prayer without disturbance. And,

having his request granted, he stood for fully two hours praying, with so much of the grace of God that his captors were astonished, and began to repent of their errand in coming forth against so godly and venerable an old man. After he had ceased praying, they set him on an ass and led him into the city. There was a great tumult of people when it was known that Polycarp was taken. He was brought before the proconsul. "Have respect to thy old age," said his judge. "Swear by the fortune of Cæsar; repent, and say, 'Away with the atheists.'" But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on the pagan multitude that packed the court, and waving his hand towards *them*, looked up to heaven with groans, and exclaimed, "Away with the atheists." The proconsul continued to urge him—"Swear, and I will set thee at liberty. Reproach Christ." "Eighty and six years have I served Him," said Polycarp, "and He never did me any injury; how, then, can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" The proconsul threatened him with wild beasts. Polycarp answered, "Call them, then." "I will cause thee to be consumed by fire," said the exasperated magistrate, "seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent." The old man replied, "Thou threatenest me with the fire that burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt." Then he was filled with confidence and joy, and his countenance shone with grace. The proconsul sent a herald to proclaim thrice in the court, "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." He was sentenced to be burnt. The furious multitude gathered wood and fagots from shops and baths—the Jews foremost in the cruel work. They would have nailed him to the stake, but Polycarp said, "Leave me as I am; for He that giveth me strength to endure the fire will also enable me, without

your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile." So they only bound him. Then he stood with his hands behind him and offered prayer, thanking God that he was found worthy of that day and hour, while they kindled the fire and it blazed up with great fury. The account of the martyrdom from which this narrative is taken—the oldest of the "Martyrologia"—here adds some absurd marvels which it is needless to quote. There can be little doubt that these are additions of later writers. The account given by Eusebius omits the most extravagant of them. It is enough to know that the brave old man died as he had lived, faithful to his Lord and Saviour. Others also perished in the persecutions in the East.

15. **The Martyrs of Gaul, A.D. 177.**—But ten years later, in the seventeenth year of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a more terrible persecution raged in the towns of Lyons and Vienne in Gaul. The Churches in these places were closely connected with Eastern Christendom. They seem to have been largely composed of colonists from Asia Minor. A most thrilling account of the persecution is given in the letter from the Churches of Lyons and Vienne to their brethren in Asia and Phrygia. These towns were centres of Christian activity. They were also centres of the sacrificial worship of the emperor. Thus the two opposed systems of devotion were brought into collision. As was commonly the case, natural calamities roused the superstitious rage of the populace. The outbreak began with an attack on the houses of the Christians at Lyons by the excited mob. The victims caught in this raid, and others hunted up and secured, were thrown into prison. They were accused of reviving the feasts of Thyestes, devouring children and committing other abominable crimes. Great numbers of them were subjected to frightful tortures. Slaves were tortured to wring evidence out of them against their masters. Vettius Epagathus, the Nicodemus of his age, a distinguished

citizen who had concealed his faith, unable to endure the sight of this barbarous injustice, came forward boldly to undertake the defence of his brethren before the tribunal. He, too, was charged with being a Christian, and he owned to the charge. But no harm was offered to him, possibly out of regard for his influential connections.

The deacon Sanctus was subjected to an incredible round of torments. In answer to all inquiries, he simply answered, "*Christianus sum*" (I am a Christian). At last they applied red-hot plates of brass to the most tender parts of his body. He became one mass of bruises and sores and burns, scarcely recognizable as a human form. Yet he lived after this to undergo similar tortures a second day.

Biblias, a poor woman whose courage had failed her and who had renounced Christ, was not spared. Brought up to be punished with the rest, in the agony of her soul she returned to her faithful confession.

These methods failing, others were tried. Some were thrown into dark dungeons, and some into the most noisome parts of the prison; some had their feet put into the stocks, which were strained to the fifth hole; some died in prison, suffocated. Pothinus, the bishop, was nearly ninety years old, and so feeble that he could scarcely draw his breath when he was borne before the tribunal and witnessed a good confession. The proconsul asked who was the God of the Christians. He replied, "If you be worthy, you shall know." He was dragged up and down in the most inhuman manner, kicked and cuffed, and after suffering more brutal treatment, flung into a dungeon, where in two days he died.

16. The Story of Blandina.—The story of Blandina is the most pathetic and at the same time the most inspiring of all the narratives of these noble martyrs. She was a slave, a mere child in age, only fifteen years old, small and feeble. Her mistress dreaded lest the frail girl should succumb before the terrors to which she would be subjected. She

was tortured as no one else had been; and she endured all with cheerful courage. The Christians were to be thrown to the wild beasts in the presence of a howling crowd of spectators. Blandina was tied to a stake to serve as food for the ravenous animals. She stood with her arms extended, calm and smiling. The dying Christians saw in her a mystic emblem of the Crucified. It has been well said, "That calm smile of the poor slave was the boldest challenge ever hurled at the material omnipotence of the pagan empire." Here is a wonderful phenomenon: in her excess of suffering, Blandina reminds us of another young girl whose lot it was to endure exceptional agonies—but with a marked difference. Beatrice Cenci, as represented to us by Guido's touching portrait, bears a countenance of ineffable sadness. Blandina, the Christian slave, is happy at heart in her bodily pain. Now, contrast this strange, brave gladness with the melancholy of the great emperor Marcus Aurelius, the best man of his race, at the height of power, who was inwardly miserable; there was nothing in his Stoic philosophy to minister to the mind diseased. Surely we have in the triumphant joy of martyrdom a fine evidence of the spiritual power of Christianity! No doubt the presence of numbers was mutually helpful; no doubt dread of the shame and disgrace of apostasy would be a powerful safeguard; no doubt the excitement and ecstasy of the hour would even act upon the nerves physically as an anodyne to excessive pain. But, after making all due allowance for such influences, who will not see in the marvellous courage and cheerfulness of the slight and feeble child a proof of the superhuman power of the gospel?

The end was not yet. The wild beasts refused to touch Blandina. Perhaps they were scared at the fearless calmness of the gentle martyr. We are reminded of Una and the lion.

The prisoners who survived were reserved for a time.

They were so numerous and firm that the perplexed proconsul consulted the emperor as to what he should do with them. Some weeks elapsed before an answer could arrive. These weeks of respite were spent by the Christians in prison with great joy and confidence. At length the imperial reply arrived. It was hard and cruel. Roman citizens who persevered in their confession of faith were to be beheaded, apostates released, and all other accused persons subjected to the full penalties of the law. This mandate was mercilessly carried out.

It was the first of August, the occasion of the great annual festival in honour of the worship of Augustus. Delegates from all parts of Gaul were assembled. The slaughter of the Christians formed the most interesting part of the *fêtes* on this occasion. Blandina was reserved for the last. Day after day she and a lad, Ponticus, were led into the amphitheatre to witness the frightful sufferings of their fellow-Christians. When at length the turn of Ponticus came, his companion did her utmost to encourage him, and was rewarded by seeing him faithful in death. Then Blandina was seized, "rejoicing as though going to a nuptial supper." She was scourged, exposed to the fury of wild beasts, and saved alive to be set in the iron chair, a diabolical instrument of torture which was made red-hot just before the victim was forced into it. Then she was bound in a net, and given to a furious bull to toss and gore. Life still lingering in her, the wearied tormentors finally slew her with a sword-thrust.

The enthusiasm, joy, and confidence of the martyrs of this fearful persecution cannot but strike us. But they were not less remarkable for their good sense and humility. They refused to be called martyrs, accepting only the simpler name of confessors. They were not intoxicated into self-elation, as some later martyrs too often permitted themselves to be.

For all these slaughters Christianity was not exter-

minated in the persecuted districts. Soon afterwards Irenæus visited the towns and reconstituted the Churches there.

The persecutions in Gaul were probably the most severe. Lyons and Vienne bore the worst blows. But neighbouring districts suffered. At Autun St. Symphoria was killed for refusing to worship the goddess Cybele.

Justin Martyr's "Apology" seems to have had no influence on Marcus Aurelius. Probably the busy emperor never allowed himself time even to glance at it. Four other defences of Christianity were presented to Marcus, one by Melito of Sardis, a second by Miltiades, a masterly and philosophic treatise by Athenagoras, and a work by Apollinaris, Bishop of Hierapolis, of which no fragment remains. But all of them failed to overcome the prejudices of the government.

17. "The Thundering Legion."—The legend of "The Thundering Legion" narrated by writers of the third and fourth centuries sets forth how the emperor was moved by a miracle to take a more friendly view of Christianity. It is said that in the war with the Quadi, during the year A.D. 174, the Roman army suffered terribly from drought, and was saved by a sudden fall of rain in answer to the prayers of the Christians, and that the consequence was that the emperor came to regard the Christians with some favour. There is no doubt that the army was saved by the rain, and also no doubt that the Christian soldiers attributed the result to their prayers. But it is equally beyond question that the pagan soldiers accredited the rainfall to Jupiter, as extant inscriptions plainly show. Moreover, persecutions did not cease during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. There is no contemporary evidence to support the legend. The miserable story of the philosophic emperor's treatment of Christianity is complete to the end. It is in keeping with the irony of the whole course of events that the deliverance which

followed the death of the good and noble Marcus came through the hands of his vile and worthless son Commodus (A.D. 180).

18. **Commodus and Marcia, A.D. 180-192.**—It has been said that the greatest misfortune of the times was the fact that Marcus Aurelius had a son. Had he adopted a successor he would probably have made a wise course. His natural heir revived the ferocious, gladiatorial stamp of Cæsar, which men fondly dreamed to have passed away for ever. He was vicious and cruel; his greatest delight was in the slaughters of the arena. Nevertheless, this brutal monster at once checked the persecution of the Christians. He may have taken a stupid delight in reversing the decrees of his father. He certainly could not have entered into the complex reasons of state which appeared to justify the recent severities. The pagan devotion which seemed to consecrate them was no more congenial to Commodus than was the Christian devotion which inspired the heroism of the martyrs. Indifference to religion may account for the absence of religious persecution. The devout bigot is always a more bitter antagonist than the profligate man of the world.

But there was an influence in a very high place that was directly put forth for the protection of the Christians. Marcia, the favourite mistress of Commodus, is sometimes claimed as a Christian. Hers was not the life that could bring honour upon a Church, and she was not a woman whose character would encourage us to regard her as the Esther of the new dispensation. Nevertheless, there is something noble in the defence she extended to the despised faith. She was probably a proselyte in her humbler and happier days; and she always showed sympathy for her former co-religionists. Owing to her brave exertions a large number of exiles were recalled from Sicily. The unwonted sight of Christians in the imperial court might now be witnessed. The old laws were not repealed, and

occasional outbreaks of persecution showed that they might be again put in force with all their severity. But for the present the Churches were generally at rest. In Asia Minor a proconsul, Arrius Antoninus, bestirred himself officiously in the direction of revived persecution. But he was fairly confounded by the hosts of Christians who voluntarily surrendered to trial. "Wretches," he cried, "if you wish to die, you have rocks and ropes at hand;" and with that he dismissed them.

19. **Progress of Christianity during the Second Century.**—We have seen that during the second century Christianity was libelled, banned, outlawed, scorned, hated, and persecuted. It would have been remarkable if, under such adverse circumstances, it had simply held its ground. Yet when we look at the obscure and limited position of the new religion at the opening of the century, and then try to measure the area over which it was spread, the number of its converts and the extension of its influence in society at the close, we see that this was a time of marvellous progress. The tree into which the mustard seed had already grown had cast its roots deep into the Roman empire, and spread its branches beyond in all directions. Beginning with Syria, the original centre of Christianity, we find Churches planted in many of its towns and villages. Asia Minor, the scene of the most assiduous labours of St. Paul and St. John, was the province where the Christians were most numerous. In some parts of Phrygia they were in a majority. Missionaries were very energetic in Pontus. Even Parthia, Armenia, Media, and Arabia were visited. Pantænus, the great catechist of Alexandria, went as missionary to "India"—the name India being of vague application, this mission may have been anywhere in the direction of the Persian Gulf. Greece was slower to yield; but Alexandria was so far influenced that when Hadrian visited it in his tour of inspection among the Greek universities, the most remarkable characteristic of

its schools to strike the emperor was the Jewish and Christian teaching. At Carthage, early in the third century, the Christians were one-tenth of the population. Numidia and Mauritania were also visited by missionaries. By the end of the second century there were sixty bishops in Italy. We have seen that there were vigorous Churches in Gaul. Thence the gospel spread eastward into the forests of Germany and across the Channel to Britain. According to Bede, in the days of Marcus Aurelius, King Lucius sent from our island to Eleutherius, Bishop of Rome, for evangelists, and received a Christian mission in response to his request. But it is more likely that the gospel found its way here through the instrumentality of obscure and unofficial men.

The mistakes into which even Christian travellers so often fall through their hasty judgment upon the missionary enterprises of our day should make us cautious in giving much weight to the observation of outsiders heathens and enemies, concerning the Christians of the second century. Still they bear an indirect testimony that is very valuable. Tacitus dismissed the new religion with a contemptuous phrase. A century later the first literary men of the day are seen to be studying it and attempting elaborate refutations. Celsus, the great champion of paganism, writes a careful treatise in opposition to Christianity. Lucian considers it sufficiently well known to be satirized in company with the older religions. Philostratus, in his "History of Apollonius of Tyana," makes the life of his hero an imitation of the Gospel narrative. Christianity can be no longer ignored. It is known and acknowledged to be influential and widespread.

CHAPTER III.

FROM SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS TO CONSTANTINE.

Characteristics of the third century—Septimius Severus, A.D. 193-211—Martyrdom in Egypt—Perpetua and Felicitas—Condition of the Christians—Forty years' peace, A.D. 211-250—Great Decian persecution, A.D. 250—The martyrs—The "lapsed"—Gallus, A.D. 251-253—Persecution by Valerian, A.D. 257-259—The first edict of toleration, A.D. 260—Diocletian's persecution, A.D. 303—Four persecuting edicts—Execution of these edicts—Persecution stayed by Galerius, A.D. 311—Maximin Daza's diabolical contrivances—Constantine—Edict of Milan, A.D. 313.

1. Characteristics of the Third Century.—The third century of the Christian era is characterized by long periods of comparative repose, interposed with persecutions of frightful severity. During this time the Church wins great conquests, and rises in social and political importance. But when she is attacked it is generally in a systematic campaign which spreads devastation far and wide. The Christians are no longer a handful of slaves and artisans beneath the contempt of Rome, as they appeared in the first century. Nor are they to be regarded, as their enemies in the second century treated them, as pestiferous conspirators involved in the machinations of secret societies, only sufficiently dangerous to be ferreted out like vermin. They are numerous, powerful, influential. The tenets and customs of the Church are becoming known in the world. A Christian relative is to be found in some branch of almost every family. Cathedrals rise in

splendour on the finest sites of great cities. Bishops take a leading place among the citizens of every province. At court, Christian officers in high rank approach the person of the emperor. When this great religion is attacked, the result is something like civil war throughout the empire, except that the fighting is all on one side and the victory is all on the other. Before the century is over Christianity has become an imperial question of first magnitude.

A curious fact is particularly conspicuous in this period. As a rule, the treatment of the Church is worst when the government of the empire is best. The good emperors persecute. The bad emperors leave the Christians in peace. The explanation of this apparent paradox is very simple. The better emperors endeavoured to bring back the old Roman manners and customs which were all interwoven with the pagan state religion, and they exerted themselves to uproot what appeared to them to be disorderly factions. But the inferior emperors generally boasted of a bastard liberalism. They were eclectics in religion to a monstrous degree. Absorbed in their own pleasures, they were indifferent to the habits of their subjects. In the ill-kept garden any strange plant may grow unchecked; it is in the trim plot that the gardener ruthlessly weeds out even the most beautiful flower if it springs up self-sown, and interferes with his design of the parterre.

2. Septimius Severus, A.D. 193-211.—The overthrow of the family of the Antonines left the world in disorder. One after another, in rapid succession, like the kings in Macbeth's vision, upstart emperors cut their way to the throne with their sword, or ignominiously purchased the purple by the expenditure of a great fortune, only to reign anxiously for a few months, to suffer assassination, and to be followed by equally unworthy adventurers. Such rulers were too much concerned with their own position to care for that of a religious sect. No systematic persecution

was organized during this time of confusion. But the relaxing of the central power left the Christians at the mercy of local enemies. The spite of a proconsul and the fanaticism of a riotous mob were free to do their worst. Clement of Alexandria tells us that in his own neighbourhood during this time "the blood of innocent Christians flowed in torrents every day."

The empire needed a master, and at length it found one in Septimius Severus, a man who climbed to the throne of the world over the slain bodies of his defeated rivals. He was a stern military despot, and his reign was one of martial law. But his vigorous measures crushed out all rebellion, and restored the world to the comparative prosperity that can only be enjoyed under a settled government.

Severus was too good an emperor not to be a persecutor of the Christians. It is said that his attention was first directed to them by the violent excesses of the Montanist, or ultra-Puritan, faction. Possibly the objection of Christians to attend the public games raised his suspicions of their disaffection. But it is probable that the fierce fanaticism of Oriental priestcraft was the influence under which the emperor decided to take action. He was in the East. Following the fashion of the times, he permitted himself to be initiated in the mysteries of Oriental cults. While breathing the feverish atmosphere of the fiercest enmity to Christianity among the priests of Isis and of Serapis, Severus issued an edict forbidding the propagation of new doctrines and the change of religions (A.D. 203). The inconsistency of this decree with his own conduct in adopting a strange Oriental worship is glaring. But the object of it may be at once recognized. It was aimed at the one religion which was pre-eminently aggressive, the one faith the first duty of whose followers was to go forth as missionaries to their fellow-men. The execution of the edict of Severus led to violent persecution.

3. **Martyrdom in Egypt.**—It began in Egypt. Victims were sought out from far away in the desert, and brought up to Alexandria for trial and execution. Leonidas, the father of Origen, was one of the first to suffer death. Potameia, a beautiful girl of high intellectual gifts, was threatened with a worse fate. It is almost inconceivable that in an imperial court of justice a high officer should propose, in the name of law and as a formal punishment, the perpetration of the vilest possible outrage on nature. It is necessary to know that such hideous forms of torture once conceived by a low imagination became common to a sickening degree, in order that we may see how frightfully the corrupt Roman government needed the leaven of the pure religion of the New Testament, as well as how terrible the trial of faith in many of the Christians must have been. Potameia had time given her for consideration. Then she was called up to declare her decision. Her reply showed that come what might she could not forsake her Lord and Saviour. As we move on among heart-rending scenes, it is a relief to know that in this one instance, and also, we may believe, in many others, human nature itself revolted against the execution of the worst threats. Potameia was condemned to death. They poured hot pitch upon her body—"leisurely," says Eusebius—beginning with her feet till they reached the crown of her head. There is a touch of romance even in this tragic tale. Human hearts are the same all the world over. One of the military attendants, Basilides by name, was smitten with admiration for the martyr-maiden. As the procession moved to the place of execution he protected her from the insults of the mob. Potameia was grateful for his kindness; she promised to entreat the Lord for him, and said that in a little while she would reward him. After her death Basilides refused to take a pagan oath. His companions thought he was jesting; but he boldly confessed himself a Christian. When some of the Christians came to inquire

of him how he had been so suddenly converted, Basilides told them—so the story in Eusebius runs—that three nights after her death, Potameia appeared to him in a vision, put a crown on his head, and said she had entreated the Lord for him, and had obtained her request, and in a little while the Lord would take him up to Himself. Basilides was beheaded the next day.

4. **Perpetua and Felicitas.**—In Carthage and the surrounding province of Africa the persecution was most severe. It broke out here with a popular tumult before the issue of the emperor's decree. After the receipt of the imperial edict the persecution became more general. The well-known, touching story of Perpetua and Felicitas belongs to this time. The one a young mother with her babe at her breast, the other on the eve of maternity, these two delicate Christian ladies were flung into a loathsome dungeon. In a short time Felicitas lay on a rotting bed of straw with her firstborn child by her side. It was a strange world that the little unconscious infant first opened his eyes upon—grim prison walls, harsh jailers, a mother about to be snatched from him and devoured by wild beasts. The two mothers were racked with tortures. Frail as they were in body, nothing moved their constant fidelity. Perpetua's great trial was through her maternal and filial affection. Her father came to beseech her to recant. The heart-broken old man threw himself at his daughter's feet; he buried her hands in kisses and tears; in his agony he besought her to give him back his child. The unwonted sight of her beloved father in the humble attitude of a suppliant, the clinging helplessness of her beautiful baby—what pleas were these with a woman's heart! Perpetua was human. Her heart bled. She could not but break down in tears. "I weep," cried the piteous young mother—"I weep over the white hairs of my father. I groan because he is the only one of my family not to rejoice in my death." But Perpetua was a Christian.

She had learnt the hard lesson that they who love father or child more than Christ are not worthy of Him. "Know," she added gently, "we are not our own. We are in the hands of God." She was destined to endure a repetition of the same trial at her death. The ladies were both condemned to be devoured by wild beasts, under the gloating gaze of a multitude enjoying their holiday at the festival in celebration of the proclamation of Severus's young son Geta as Cæsar. In the arena her father made a last attempt to save his daughter. But it was in vain. The two young mothers were faithful unto death.

5. Condition of the Christians.—All were not equally faithful. We now often meet with tales of apostasy which become terribly common as the century lengthens out. The heroic age of the Church is passing away. Few were weak enough to fall before the terrors of torture and death in the earlier period; but relaxed discipline and growing ease now begin to produce their fruits in increasing weakness under trial. Some take advantage of the friendliness of their judges to purchase their liberty with bribes. A great number flee. For this prudent action they cannot be blamed, as it was distinctly authorized by Christ. But there were those who grieved over it. At Carthage, Tertullian, the Christian Cicero, severely rebuked the weakness of those who flinched from the fires of martyrdom. It was the persecution of these times which led him to write his magnificent "Apology," a treatise of burning eloquence and enthusiasm, in which he aimed at vindicating his faithful brethren before the government and the world. He pleads the cause of toleration. He denounces the injustice of summary condemnation without proof of guilt. The most wicked men are permitted to defend themselves with the assistance of hired pleaders. "Christians alone," he says, "are forbidden to say anything in exculpation of themselves." Tertullian boldly defends them; and his defence throws some light on the accusations brought

against them. In the first place, he bitterly complains of the ignorance and blind prejudice which condemn without inquiry. Infamous crimes are still libellously ascribed to the Church. Christians are blamed for abandoning the gods. They are rebels against the emperor. War, pestilence, and famine are induced through their insults to the gods. They are morose and misanthropic in their withdrawal from social scenes. Ample refutations of all these calumnies may be found clothed in the fiery African's passionate rhetoric.

Some mitigation of the hard lot of the Christians was obtained even under the stern government of Septimius Severus. License to meet had already been granted to certain funeral guilds as an exception to the law against secret societies. But the enjoyment of this privilege was very limited until the time of Severus. That emperor made it universal throughout Rome, Italy, and the provinces. The Christians were quick to avail themselves of the concession. It enabled them to use those vast subterranean sepulchres, the catacombs, as places of Christian assembly. The Archdeacon Callistus was recognized by the government as in charge of the new cemetery in the Appian Way. It could not but be known that, under the subterfuge of business meetings of a funeral club, assemblies for worship were held by members of the proscribed religion. But hush-money was forthcoming to silence unpleasant inquiries. Possibly the city prætor was willing to connive at the arrangement. Thus in these dark subterranean halls, and round the tombs of the martyrs, many a joyous assembly of Christians was held in days before it was safe to build a church above ground. Before the third century was out these strange places of worship were no longer necessary, as buildings were boldly erected in the full light of day and on conspicuous spots. But a natural reverence long drew pilgrims to the tombs of the martyrs and the altars of the persecuted Church, about

which there lingered so many associations with those terrible times when the Christians at Rome could only meet as the members of a burial-club beneath the earth in the chambers of the dead.

6. Forty Years' Peace, A.D. 211-250.—The death of Septimius Severus while at war in the distant province of Britain (A.D. 211), and the succession of his two sons, Caracalla and Geta, put an end to the persecution. The Christians now enjoyed a forty years' peace, broken by the one savage onslaught of the barbarian Maximin. Caracalla murdered his brother Geta, and twenty thousand persons, on the pretext that they were his brother's partisans. On the slightest grounds he would order the slaughter of thousands of his subjects. But this madman, whom Gibbon calls "the common enemy of mankind," made no selection of the Christians as special victims of his ferocity. On the contrary, he issued an edict of tremendous import which indirectly favoured their cause. He granted the rights of Roman citizenship to every free man in the empire, in order that he might obtain more money in the legacy dues that were paid by the citizens. This was a step towards the denationalizing universalism which prepared the way for the reception of the Christian cosmopolitan religion. It also made the torture of Christian free men illegal, because no Roman citizen could be tortured. Subsequently, however, express orders of persecuting emperors robbed them of this privilege.

The Emperor Elagabalus (A.D. 218-222) was the most contemptible and disgusting creature whose portrait it has been the misfortune of history to paint. Wading through the fetid slough of his own inconceivable vices, he took no notice of the growing influence of Christianity.

Another Syrian monarch, Alexander Severus, treated the Christians with marked favour. In his palace he set up a statue of Christ by the side of statues of Abraham, Orpheus, etc. When referred to in a dispute about a piece

of land between a tavern-keeper and the Christians, the emperor gave his judgment in favour of the latter, saying, "It was better that God should be worshipped there in any way whatever, than that the place should be given up to the cooks." The giant Maximin (A.D. 235-238), the murderer of Alexander Severus, and his successor, condemned to death several Christians, apparently for the sole reason that they had been in the household of Severus. As a reversal of the policy of his predecessor, who had patronized Christianity, Maximin conceived a novel policy. He struck at the army through its officers. He ordered the death of the presbyters and bishops. This order does not seem, however, to have been extensively executed. The Roman bishop, Pontianus, was banished to the mines—a punishment worse than that of galley-slaves—and perished of ill-treatment. Origen remained concealed for a time in the house of a Christian virgin. In Cappadocia the persecution was severe. A terrible earthquake, which swallowed up whole cities, roused the fanaticism of the mob, who were seconded by the governor of the province, Serenianus, "a bitter and terrible persecutor." The persecution was local; and suspects were free to escape by flight from dangerous centres.

The brief reigns of Maximin's immediate successors left no mark on the Church. Philip the Arabian was said to have been a Christian. But his celebration of the "secular games," with all their accompaniments of pagan ritual, is decisive proof against so improbable a supposition. During this long period of rest the Church became so unaccustomed to persecution as to be little prepared for the terrible storm that was about to burst on her head with far greater severity than any she had hitherto experienced.

7. Great Decian Persecution, A.D. 250.—Decius came to the throne in troublous times (A.D. 249). He determined to make one supreme effort to reinvigorate the decaying empire. Herein lies the secret of his policy, and

the explanation of his treatment of the Christians. The emperor aimed at restoring the institutions and manners of the past. Whenever that aim was pursued, the Christians, who were regarded as the most dangerous innovators, were singled out for punishment. It was so now. Three points distinctive of this persecution should be observed. (1) It was *instigated by the emperor* in a deliberate scheme of state policy. Unlike most earlier persecutions, this one of Decius was systematic and according to a set purpose. It was not a spontaneous outburst of popular hatred sanctioned by the government; nor was it merely the quickened execution of old laws against illegal societies and unlicensed faiths. The emperor himself set it on foot, and he it was who carried it out with a vigorous determination to subdue the growing Church. (2) It was *general throughout the empire*, not local as most other persecutions, which depended on the caprice of an official or the temper of a mob, had been. (3) Perhaps the most terrible feature of the persecution, however, was determined by its peculiar object, which was not to punish Christians as criminals, but to *persuade and terrify them into renouncing their faith*. To that end tortures of the cruelest character were resorted to.

In the year A.D. 250 the Emperor Decius sent to the governors of every province a decree ordering all Christians, without exception, to perform the rites of the state religion. Those who refused were to be urged by threats and tortures. Each local governor fixed a period within which the heathen sacrifices were to be offered. Any who fled were not hindered, though their property was confiscated, and they were forbidden to return under pain of death. At the end of the term prescribed, all who had not sacrificed were to be summoned before a tribunal consisting of the magistrates and five leading citizens. The prisoners were at first dealt with gently. Every art of persuasion was used to induce them to sacrifice to the gods. Attempts

were made to bring about this result by sophistry and deceit. When those methods failed, recourse was had to torture. Many died under the agonies thus inflicted. But it was not at first in accordance with the imperial policy to execute capital punishment on the victims. This would have defeated the end in view; for apostasy, not extermination, was aimed at throughout. A deep insight into the effects of persecution had taught the imperial advisers that the Church suffered heavily by the shame of her faithless children, while she seemed to gain strength through the heroism of her martyrs. Therefore at first only bishops were slain. But as the milder measures failed, the persecution waxed more severe.

8. The Martyrs.—The general persecution was preceded by a popular outburst in Alexandria, of which Dionysius gives us a graphic account in one of his letters. The people were excited by "a certain prophet and poet." They seized an old man named Metras, and when he refused to utter blasphemies, beat his body with heavy sticks, cut him about the face with reeds, dragged him out to the suburbs and stoned him. They carried Quinta, a Christian woman, to an idol temple, and seeing that she refused to sacrifice, bound her feet together, and dragged her over the rough stones of the street to the same place, and there stoned her. They combined vulgar pillage with religious fanaticism, and rushed into the houses of Christians to plunder them. They seized Apollonia, a venerable virgin, dashed out her teeth, and threatened her with fire. She shrank at first, but on being let loose leaped into the flames and was consumed. They tortured one Serapian by breaking his limbs, and afterwards dashed him headlong from an upper story to the ground.

After the issue of the imperial edict the persecution in Alexandria was rekindled with additional fury. Among others, Dioscorus, a boy of fifteen years, was arrested. The judge tried to deceive the lad with fair speeches, and then

resorted to torture. Dioscorus was inflexible. The extreme wisdom of his answers so impressed the judge that he set the boy at liberty. "And," adds Dionysius, "this most godly Dioscorus is with us at present, tarrying for a greater conflict and a more lengthened contest." A curious incident illustrates the foolish fanaticism which was beginning to seek for martyrdom in a very different spirit from the simplicity which usually characterized earlier periods. A band of soldiers took up a position in front of the tribunal, and exhibited frantic gestures if ever any weak Christian seemed about to recant. When they had attracted all eyes, they rushed forward and declared themselves Christians. The magistrate and his colleagues were really frightened. There was no alternative but to inflict capital punishment. The enthusiasts accepted their fate as a glorious triumph. A wiser course was taken by Dionysius himself, and Cyprian, the famous Bishop of Carthage, for these leading men set an example of prudence by withdrawing from a scene which would have been certain death to them. In his seclusion Cyprian was able to be most helpful to his flock. The letters which he sent them are among the most valuable relics of patristic literature.

An episcopate in those times was a foremost post of danger. As one after another the brave heroes fell, it is inspiring to see how unflinching successors were always ready to step into the vacant places, though doing so meant almost certain death. Thus Fabianus, the Bishop of Rome, is martyred. Cornelius does not shrink from succeeding him, and is soon banished and executed. Nothing daunted, Lucius follows, and he too is martyred. At the present day the visitor to the catacomb of St. Callistus may see the three graves of these three martyr-bishops, side by side, each with simply a name inscribed upon it. The two metropolitan bishops in the East suffered martyrdom. Alexander of Jerusalem died in prison. Babylas of

Antioch was beheaded. But first six of his young catechumens were beheaded before his eyes. As the old man laid his head upon the block he exclaimed, "Here am I, O God, and the children whom Thou hast given me."

Great honour was shown by their fellow-Christians to the Decian martyrs in their prisons. Offerings were collected for them, and they were most liberally supported. Their intercessions were sought by miserable men and women who had proved too weak to stand the test of those hard times. The absolution they granted seriously interfered with the growing authority of the bishops. When we come to consider the question of Church government we shall see that trouble arose in the Church from this cause.

9. *The "Lapsed."*—There is a sad page in the history of the Decian persecution. Never before had so many been found unable to stand under trial. It is true that never before had persecution been so generally severe. Still, when all allowance is made for the peculiar harshness of the test, it must be admitted that there was evidence of a great decay of Christian heroism. Relaxed discipline had led to the admission of many unfit candidates into the Church, and quiet, prosperous times had developed a dangerous love of ease and its accompanying horror of pain. The failings were chiefly in the great cities and among the richer Christians. "A large number," says Dionysius, "accommodated themselves to the decree out of fear; some were dragged to the impure sacrifices by their friends; others yielded pale and trembling, as if they were not to offer sacrifice, but to be themselves the sacrifices and victims for the idols, so that they were jeered by the large multitude surrounding the scene, and made it plain to all that they were too cowardly either to face death or to offer the sacrifices. But there were others who hurried up to the altars with greater alacrity, stoutly asserting that they had never been Christians." Those

who yielded to the foe were distinguished according to the measure of the weakness of these people. Thus there were (1) the *sacrificati*, who actually took part in heathen sacrificing, eating "meat offered to idols;" and (2) the *libellatici*, who purchased of the officials, or even had thrust on them, certificates stating that they had renounced the Christian religion, although they had not done so. When the storm had passed, and the fugitives had returned, and the Church was again free to attend to her internal affairs, the question of the reception of the "lapsed" became one of painful importance. Crowds of miserable penitents begged humbly for forgiveness and readmission to their old privileges. The stricter sects were unwilling to condone their grievous weakness. But the Catholic majority of the Church showed a more charitable spirit, and consented to welcome them back after taking certain precautions for ascertaining the genuineness of their repentance. We shall see later on that about this time a dangerous laxity was developed through the assumption of the power of priestly absolution by the bishops. One thing, however, was clear: Decius had failed in his objects. He had not won his recalcitrant subjects back to their old pagan religion. Even those who sacrificed with their hands hated the deed in their hearts, and loathed the memory of it after the terrors of torture which had driven them into it were past. They were still Christian in belief and desire. Their shameful concession no more induced an affection for the odious blasphemies of heathenism than St. Peter's denial of his Master led him to look kindly on the enemies of Christ. Cyprian tells us how one was struck dumb the moment after he had denied Christ; how another was seized with an evil spirit and flung into convulsion; how some were punished with death. These stories at least serve to illustrate the horror with which apostasy was regarded by the Christians. The full force of the state had been put forth. Every means which a cruel ingenuity

could devise had been resorted to in order to coax and force the Christians into the abandonment of their faith. The Church had suffered grievously under the fearful trial, though her losses must be attributed rather to her own weakness than to the tactics of her enemies. But her very shame was her salvation. Her eyes were opened to her fallen condition. The chaff was separated from the wheat. Purged and humbled, she was better fitted for her future mission even by the sad revelation of her own weak places. Moreover, the heroism of her faithful confessors showed that the candlestick had not been removed from her midst. "The noble army of martyrs" gathered out of the Decian persecution one of its most valiant regiments.

10. Gallus, A.D. 251-253.—Decius perished miserably in a morass during a disastrous war with the Goths. The Christians had but a short breathing-time at the beginning of the reign of his successor, Gallus. A dreadful pestilence spread through the whole Roman empire. In several provinces drought and famine increased the public distress. As was usual in similar cases, the superstitions of the populace attributed these calamities to the anger of the gods which the Christians had excited. Persecution began with a popular outburst in Africa, where the plague raged most furiously. Then the emperor issued a general edict, commanding all Roman subjects to sacrifice to the gods for the removal of the fatal pestilence. The number of Christians who abstained from sacrificing was noticed with alarm and rage. Many were punished—some with banishment to the mines, some with death. There is no disgrace to mar the splendour of this page of the Church's annals of martyrdom, for we now hear no more of faithless deserters. The shame of the great Decian persecution is wiped out. "How many of the lapsed," writes Cyprian, "have been restored by a glorious confession!" The smelting of that great furnace had done its work well. Much of the old dross was consumed. Like

silver purified seven times, the humbled, repentant Church was once again worthy of the traditions of her brave fathers in the olden times.

Cyprian, the great Bishop of Antioch, was again the counsellor and stay of his tried brethren. He wrote to Demetrius, one of the leaders of the persecution, an eloquent refutation of the calumnies charged against the Christians. He dared to beard the lion in his den; for his defence was no apology; it was an accusation. He charged the heathen with the vices and crimes which had called down the judgment of Heaven upon the wicked world. Cyprian also exerted himself to encourage those Christians who shrank before the horrors of the plague. To the alarmed and the sufferers Cyprian pointed out how even this terrible death might be mercifully sent to save them from the sin and shame of apostasy under persecution. At the same time the indefatigable bishop exerted himself to raise funds for the relief of captive Christians, who had been carried into the desert of Africa by hordes of savages.

11. Persecution by Valerian, A.D. 257-259.—The Emperor Valerian began his reign with a friendly treatment of the Christians. Demetrius of Alexandria tells us that none of his predecessors evinced so kindly and favourable a disposition towards them, and that his whole house was so filled with the pious that "it was itself a very Church of God." When he was driven into the policy of persecution he began with the mildest possible measures, and only resorted to more severe expedients after these had failed. Why, then, did Valerian persecute at all? Ought he not to have learnt the lesson taught so clearly by the costly failure of earlier persecutors? An explanation of his change of front towards the Christians is offered by Demetrius. In the opinion of this contemporary writer—if he is correctly reported by Eusebius—Valerian was greatly influenced by a famous magician, Macrianus. The spells and charms by means of which the sorcerer won

over the emperor need not have been of any mysterious character. A strong fascination was exerted by the belief in magic in those days, as we have already seen. When once Macrianus had gained his power over Valerian, he would be certain to use it in opposition to the Christians, who were the deadliest foes of all his class.

The persecution under Valerian is divided into two stages. The first stage was mild. It indicated a change of policy in the imperial treatment of Christianity, brought about, probably, by the admitted failure of the violent measures of Decius. The special characteristic of the new policy was an attempt to suppress Christianity without bloodshed. In the year A.D. 254, a formal registration of bishops in the state archives was commenced. This action was an important recognition of the Church as an organized society. But it enabled the government to discover the leaders of the Christian community, and so when necessary to strike home at head-quarters. In the year A.D. 257, Valerian issued orders which suggest to us the analogy of the Five Mile and Conventicle Acts. (1) The bishops were to be banished from their flocks. (2) Christian assemblies were forbidden. (3) Visits to the cemeteries, where the courage and fidelity of the Christians were fired to enthusiasm in the presence of the tombs of the martyrs, were also proscribed. These regulations were skilfully devised. They reveal some knowledge of the constitution and life of the Church. It was hoped that when the leaders were gone, and the inspiring influence of numbers removed by the suppression of public worship, the disorganization of the Church would be fatal to its continued prosperity. What her enemies could not see was that she was more than an organized society. But experience soon showed that banished bishops could communicate with their flocks. Like the Covenanters, when driven to assemble on wild heaths or in mountain caves, the Christians of the third century retained their faith and

fervour when the ordinances of public assembly were totally deranged. The banished bishops even gained additional influence through the veneration which honoured them as martyrs. Plainly the new device was a failure.

Seeing this, Valerian permitted himself to be hurried on to more severe measures. The next year, A.D. 258, a new edict was issued, the execution of which marks the second stage of the persecution. (1) Bishops, presbyters, and deacons, were to be summarily put to death. (2) Senators and knights were to be robbed of their rank and property; if they still persisted in their Christianity they were to be beheaded. (3) Ladies of high position were to be deprived of their property and banished. (4) Servants in the imperial household who confessed the new religion were to forfeit their goods, and be sent in chains to work on the emperor's estates. The object of these elaborate regulations was to check the progress of Christianity in its spiritual leaders and in the upper classes. But when once the hounds have tasted blood, they are not over nice in selecting their prey. The persecution was not confined to the classes named in the imperial rescript. Dionysius tells us that men and women, young and old, soldiers and peasants, persons of every condition, were visited with scourge and fire and sword. Accounts of martyrdom reach us from all quarters—from Cæsarea, from Gaul, from Spain, from Carthage, from Italy. In Rome, the bishop Sixtus, with four deacons, was arrested while conducting Divine service in the catacombs. After condemnation, the martyr was led back to the catacombs. On the way his deacon Laurentius met him. "Whither goest thou, father, without thy son?" said Laurentius. "Cease weeping," said the bishop; "thou wilt soon follow me." Sixtus was beheaded on the spot where he had just been celebrating the Lord's Supper, and his episcopal chair was sprinkled with his blood. Four days Laurentius was martyred—roasted, it is said, on an iron chair. A Christian congrega-

tion holding service in one of the catacombs was surprised by the heathen, who walled up the entrance and left the martyrs to perish in a living tomb. In Africa, a great number of Christians were thrown into a lime-kiln and burned. By a bold confession and a noble death the great bishop Cyprian proved that it was not cowardice that led to his prudent flight before an earlier persecution. He was arrested and cross-examined under the edict of A.D. 257, and he then confessed himself a Christian, and bravely testified to the truth of the gospel. When the severer law was issued Cyprian was again seized. In response to the proconsul's inquiry he simply gave his name and then observed a dignified silence, well knowing what was in store for him. The judge read out the condemnation, which the Christians reckoned to be a glorious sentence, because it described Cyprian as a standard-bearer of his sect and an example to his people. The scene of execution was an open place surrounded by trees. Crowds pressed to witness the glorification of their leader. Zaccheus-like, some climbed the trees for a better view. Cyprian calmly affixed the bandage to his eyes with his own hands. When it was observed that the executioner was trembling, and delaying to perform his task, the martyr urged him on and was speedily beheaded. The greatest bishop of this age, judicious, eloquent, brave, and faithful, though a persistent advocate of those high and dangerous ecclesiastical notions which he did more than any one else to advance, Cyprian was a model shepherd of his flock in self-sacrificing toil and skilful administration. His death places him in the first rank of martyrs.

12. First Edict of Toleration, A.D. 260.—The Emperor Valerian was taken prisoner by the Persians in the year A.D. 259. When he died, after lingering for a while in ignominious captivity, Lactantius tells us that his skin was painted red and stuffed, and placed in a temple. The end of his reign was the end of the persecution.

Gallienus, his son, issued a most remarkable edict—the first edict of toleration ever published by a Roman emperor in favour of the Christian religion. He wrote a friendly letter to the bishops, promising them his protection; he ordered the restoration of their cemeteries and public buildings to the Christians; and he permitted the free observance of public worship. Nevertheless it is a mistake to regard this action of Gallienus as a complete liberation of Christianity from penal liability. We have no reason to suppose that it was formally placed on the list of licensed religions. The old laws under which it was always possible for its enemies to stir up persecution were unrepealed. The edict of Gallienus was simply an action of friendly indulgence, a sort of “dispensation.” But it left the Christians in peace for the remainder of the century.

Aurelian, it is said, meditated persecution; if so, his death prevented the execution of his project, and it was never carried out. The Christians were even foolish enough to call upon the emperor for a decision in a question of their own Church government, but the emperor wisely refused to interfere.

13. **Diocletian's Persecution, A.D. 303.**—The last and most terrible struggle came late in the reign of Diocletian. That great emperor had founded a new system of imperial government, dispensing with the mock authority of the senate, increasing the pomp and dignity of his office, and dividing the government between two Augusti, or first emperors, himself and Maximian, and two Cæsars, or secondary emperors, Galerius and Constantius. For sixteen years Diocletian not only tolerated the Christians; he treated them with positive friendliness. His court was full of favourite Christian servants. The highest officer of the palace, the chief chamberlain, was a Christian. Even the emperor's wife and daughter were candidates for baptism. Moreover, Diocletian was evidently anxious to

maintain the peace and prosperity of his subjects. But an attack on so numerous and prominent a body of people as the Christians now formed would be a most serious breach of peace. Why Diocletian came to sanction the persecution of such a community, including some of his best friends and dearest relatives, is one of the standing questions of history. Lactantius called him “that author of ill and deviser of misery.” Others have rushed to the opposite extreme, and regarded him as desirous of anticipating the policy of Constantine in the adoption of Christianity by the empire, had not circumstances hindered. It is clear that Diocletian persecuted reluctantly. But there is no evidence that, with all his friendliness for individual Christians, he had abandoned the old-established opinion of the Roman government in regarding the growing power of the Church with alarm. Diocletian would never have persecuted had he not been urged on by the fierce persistency of his Cæsar, Galerius, a perfect brute, and the terror of all who came near him, and infected with hatred of the Christians by his fanatical mother, who was a votary of the Phrygian goddess of the hills.

The times were gloomy. The emperor was not without superstitious terrors. It is said that he once ordered a solemn sacrifice to be offered for the investigation of the future. The court officials, including many Christians, stood round watching. No response was given. The priest interpreted the failure by the discovery that the god refused to answer because profane men were present. This is said to have determined Diocletian to persecute. Serious persecution could not have been instigated by so absurd a cause. But the emperor does seem to have given way to a momentary outburst of passion against the Christians. No harm came of it. Still here was a straw which showed which way the current was turning.

Outbreaks of fanaticism in the army led to more serious questions as to the danger of Christianity. Reports

flowed in to the emperor of how a young conscript at Treveste, in Numidia, refused to serve because he was a Christian; how at Tangiers, Marcellus, a young officer, renounced the allegiance of "*your* emperors," because a Christian should not be entangled with the things of this world. Soldiers were proving disobedient, and boasting insultingly. Here was an element of alarm for a suspicious government.

In the winter of A.D. 302-303, while Diocletian was feeling unwell and depressed, and when Galerius was visiting him at Nicomedia, long, grave discussions took place between the two in secret. All the world watched the issue. The bloodthirsty Cæsar was using every argument to persuade the old emperor into the persecution of the Christians. Counsellors were called in, who for the most part advised this mad and frightful course. As a last resort, Diocletian appealed to the oracle of Apollo at Miletus. It is needless to say that the oracle decided against its mortal enemy. At length the emperor yielded, and agreed to break the long peace between the government and the Church.

14. Four Persecuting Edicts.—It was the 23rd of February, A.D. 303, the auspicious day of the festival of the god Terminus, when, early in the morning, before it was quite light, the city prefect with his officers and attendants presented himself before the great cathedral at Nicomedia. The doors were not yet open. The first act of violence was to break through them. Then search was made everywhere for "an image of the Divinity." None was found. But the Scriptures were brought forth and burnt, and the whole building, with its contents, was given up to pillage. The cathedral was in full view of the palace, where the two emperors stood watching the scene. Galerius wished the building to be burned, but Diocletian feared that the fire might spread. For once the advice of the more cautious emperor was followed. By means of battle-

axes, hatchets, and whatever instruments came to hand, the soldiers attacked the fabric, and in a few hours the stately edifice was levelled to the ground.

The next day brought the explanation of this startling scene. An edict was placarded in the city, describing the new imperial policy towards the Christians:—(1) All the churches were to be razed to the ground, and Christian assemblies were forbidden to meet. (2) All copies of the sacred books were to be burned. (3) All Christian men of official position were to be stripped of their rank, and treated as beyond the pale of the law. (4) All Christians in private life were to be reduced to slavery. As yet no blood was to be shed. The edict of toleration was revoked, and the main lines of the policy of Valerian were followed. Nevertheless, after so many years of peace, and when the Church stood high in influence and favour, the sudden publication of this first edict of Diocletian was an insult and an outrage that bold spirits could not endure silently. A certain gentleman of Nicomedia—perhaps our patron St. George—strode up to the document, pulled it down and tore it into pieces. "See," he cried, with mocking laughter, "more triumphs over the Goths and Sarmatians." He was seized and fairly roasted to death for what was indeed pure high treason.

This first edict was not severe enough to satisfy the "Wild Beast" Galerius. Two fires in the palace at Nicomedia—kindled, it is said, by Galerius on purpose to raise suspicions against the Christians—greatly alarmed Diocletian, who tortured his household, but obtained no confession of value. The emperor's wife and daughter were suspected of complicity in the plot. Delicately nurtured, unused to pain, these poor ladies shrank from torture, and renounced their connection with Christianity. Bolder Christians in high office were staunch, and stood torture and death. The alarm of the fires drove Diocletian into the issue of his second edict. It ordered that all the

clergy were to be immediately seized and cast into prison. The execution of this decree has been pointed to as the first instance of a Christian ministry maintained at the cost of the state. Churches destroyed, assemblies forbidden, Bibles burned, priests and bishops in prison—how could Christianity survive all this? Nevertheless, it was far from being killed.

On the twentieth anniversary of Diocletian's accession, a festival was held which was made the occasion of a distribution of pardons. The dungeons were choked with bishops, priests, deacons, and readers, instead of the usual murderers and robbers. The so-called third edict promised an amnesty to these Christian ministers, *provided that they would sacrifice to the gods*. They were to be helped to a decision by torture.

The fourth edict cannot be charged against Diocletian; his colleague Maximian is responsible for that measure of violence, so contrary to the previous policy of the senior emperor, who was away from the scene, with broken health and enfeebled in mind, suffering from alternate fits of insanity and returns of reason. The savage Maximian was at the Circus Maximus, at Rome, during the celebration of the games, when suddenly, with a unanimity too marked not to be preconcerted, a cry went up from the assembly, "Away with the Christians!" It was so distinct that twelve several repetitions of it could be counted. Then it changed, and became more appealing in tone. "O Augustus! no Christianity!" was shouted ten times. Maximian was only too ready to respond to the popular petition which in all probability he had himself inspired. He issued a bloodthirsty decree, containing these words, "We advise that whosoever any Christians shall be found cherishing their superstition, they either be constrained to sacrifice to the gods, or die." In every town criers went up and down the streets, calling on men, women, and children immediately to repair to the idol temples and

sacrifice. A more rigorous measure could not be devised. But it was quite opposed to the more recent policy of Valerian and Diocletian, and was conceived in the old, mad spirit of the Decian persecution.

15. Execution of these Edicts.—The execution of these edicts led to scenes of cruelty and bloodshed throughout the empire, of ever-increasing horror, as blow after blow came from the imperial council-chamber. Orthodox Catholics and dissenting Donatists mingled their blood in a common sacrifice of fidelity to their one Lord. The Cæsar Constantius, whose wife, the famous Empress Helena, was a Christian, was always favourable to Christianity; yet even under his mild rule in Gaul and Britain blood was shed. When the second edict was promulgated, a priest fled to the camp at Verulam. There he asked shelter of a young heathen legionary, Albanus. The soldier generously received him. Watching his guest's devotions, Albanus questioned him, and by degrees received the gospel from his lips, and became a convert. On the commanding officer discovering that one of his men was harbouring a fugitive, Albanus was brought up for examination. When asked his nationality, he replied, "Why do you ask? I am a Christian." When his name was demanded, he answered, "My parents call me Albanus; but I serve God." He was ordered to be scourged and beheaded. That same evening he was executed outside the city wall, on the slope of a pleasant hill where now stands the venerable Abbey of St. Albans.

Stories of faithful martyrdom come down to us from other quarters of the empire. It was in Africa that the little St. Hilarian was martyred. This brave boy had seen his father, his two brothers, and his sister tortured before his own eyes. The proconsul tried to save him. "Was it your father," he said, "or your brothers who took you?"—i.e. to the Christian assembly. In childish treble Hilarian answered, "I am a Christian; at my own desire and of my

own free will I joined in the service with my father and the brethren." In his kind intention the judge endeavoured to frighten the child with ugly threats. "I will cut off your long hair," he said, "and your nose, and your ears, and then turn you out." The brave little fellow answered, "You can do just what you like, for I am a Christian." Much against his inclination the proconsul was compelled to pronounce sentence. On hearing it the child cried aloud, "Thanks be to God!"

Mr. A. J. Mason, in his exhaustive essay on "The Persecution of Diocletian," calls our attention to an aspect of it which is too rarely noticed. "In our deep sympathy with the sufferings and glories of our own beloved brethren the martyrs," he says, "we sometimes lose sight of the sympathy we ought to feel towards the magistrates who sentenced them; men often not only honourable and loyal, but gentle and kind-hearted, who endured with a patience which astounds us more than that of the martyrs—inasmuch as it was grounded only on human, not divine strength—insults and revilings and personal defiance at the mouths of the Christians, foolish allegorical answers to plain questions about name and birthplace, sometimes long and exasperating sermons."

Unhappily we have again to record the painful scenes of weakness and failure which were so sadly common in the Decian persecution, for long peace had again relaxed the sinews of many soldiers of the cross, and growing corruptions had added to the danger of unfaithfulness. The hierarchy was becoming tyrannous, wealthy, and worldly-minded. Eusebius deplors the degeneracy of the times, and regards the persecution as a visitation from Heaven on the sins of the Church. He tells how "the affairs of our age were through too much liberty changed into looseness and sloth;" how through envy Christians waged a war of words, and reviled one another; how bishops neglected their flocks and contended for posts of influence with

greedy selfishness; how factions divided the people; how "unspeakable hypocrisy and dissimulation had risen to the height of mischief" when "the divine vengeance began to visit us." We are not to be surprised that when, after nearly two generations of peace, persecution of greater severity than any previous attack burst over the head of the Church, many disgraced the name they bore. The conduct of possessors of Bibles led to considerable division and controversy. Some refused to produce them. Some substituted heretical and worthless works with the connivance, often at the suggestion, of kindly judges. Others gave up their copies of the Scriptures to be burned. The last were called *Traditors*. Bitter controversies subsequently rose on the conduct of these prudent people. The Donatists denounced them as apostates, while the more charitable Catholics condoned their offence—if offence it was to surrender a Bible rather than suffer torture and death.

16. Persecution stayed by Galerius, A.D. 311.—This great persecution of Diocletian and his colleagues was the death-struggle of paganism with Christianity. It had come to this: one or the other must die. Alarmed, already mortally wounded, and driven to bay, paganism gathered up its forces for one tremendous battle of extermination. It sprang at the throat of its hated rival. For a while there was confusion, bloodshed, dismay. Then the issue became more and more apparent. The last, frantic effort of heathenism was a failure. The attempt was a mistake. It came too late. The whole persecution was an anachronism. The Christians were too numerous, too influential, too well known and respected, too intimately related to all classes of society, to be exterminated like scattered aliens. The very judges who were commissioned to carry out the orders of the emperors often regarded the Christians as their friends, and in some instances honoured them highly. These pagan officers would write of "*Our bishop*,"

would even call a venerated Church dignitary "*Our father*." When things had come to this pass, the idea of putting down so well recognized and respected a religion as Christianity by force became simply absurd. The peaceful reign of Diocletian was disturbed in its latter days for nothing. In dark sad times the old emperor resigned. Galerius, now at the head of the world, soon perceived with terror the mistake he had made. He had been the originator of the persecution, and he it was who put an end to it. The conclusion is dramatic. The bad man was dying of a loathsome disease contracted by his own vices. In the agonies of his last moments he came to the conviction that he was suffering from the wrath of the offended God of the Christians. Accordingly, he issued the most extraordinary decree ever conceived by a Roman emperor. M. de Broglie calls it a "singular document, half insolent, half suppliant; which begins by insulting the Christians, and ends by asking them to pray to their Master for him." He first takes credit to himself for endeavouring to bring the Christians back to the ancient laws and discipline of the Romans. He has a fling at their own divisions, for which he maintains his persecution was a wholesome correction. In consideration of his clemency, he orders that Christianity may once more be practised and churches built. He concludes by saying that in return for this indulgence it will be the duty of the Christians to pray to their God for his health and the health of the state.

The promulgation of this decree led to a brief triumph of Christianity. Churches rose on all sides. Congregations such as had never been seen before met, the people streaming "from hills and holes where they hid themselves." As the exiles passed through the cities on their homeward journey, their brethren met them at the gates, and conducted them along the main streets and squares in glad procession with psalms and hymns.

17. Maximin Daza's Diabolical Contrivances.—

But the victory was not yet secured. Maximin Daza, a low-minded, half-savage man, was now ruling in the East in concert with Licinius. At first he submitted to the death-bed policy of his old patron Galerius with a growl of discontent. But not long after the founder of the persecution had passed away, Maximin threw off the mask. He contrived to get anti-Christian deputations sent to himself as he made a progress through the cities of his dominion. At first he issued what has been called a "permissive prohibitory act" (e.g. in the case of Tyre he granted permission to local authorities to proscribe Christianity if they chose to do so). A most extraordinary conception of fighting Christianity with its own weapons was now adopted. Under the advice of Theotecnus, Maximin attempted to establish a *Heathen Catholic Church*, with pagan bishops. The vilest deed of all was the publication of the forged "Acts of Pilate"—a book containing a mocking burlesque of the life of our Lord, with, apparently, a grossly libellous portraiture of His character. Happily it is lost. This abominable book was sent to every schoolmaster in the empire, and it was expressly ordered that every boy should learn its filthy lies by heart, be examined in them, and compose essays on them. "Thus," says Mr. Mason, "at the very age when the heart is tenderest, when the pathos of the cross and the crown of thorns tells most upon the life, all reverence and pity for Jesus Christ were to be purposely, laboriously, as a piece of school discipline, turned into contempt and ridicule and hatred." Only the devil could have prompted so fiendish a device. Only God could have preserved His pure gospel in the East in spite of such poisoning at the fountain-head. Persecution of equally vile and immoral character accompanied the new education law.

18. **Constantine.**—Meanwhile in the West a lion-like form was seen rising in power over conquered enemies. Constantine was the son of Constantius, Maximian's

Cæsar. As a young man he was the darling of the army, and the soldiers were indignant when, in deference to the tyrannous insistence of Galerius, his claims to a share in the government were set aside. Subsequently policy compelled the emperors to make him a Cæsar. From the first he always showed great friendliness to Christianity. We need not be eager to prove the reality of his Christian profession, however, for he was guilty of crimes which would be a disgrace to any religion. Probably he first favoured the Church out of motives of policy. The ambitious young emperor was keen-sighted enough to see that paganism was playing a losing game, and accordingly, with great wisdom and political liberality of thought, he threw in his lot with the rising religious party. But it is certain that he grew at least into a sort of superstitious faith in Christianity. He was neither a hypocrite nor a genuine Christian, but a man with a pagan disposition and an honest, ignorant, superstitious belief in Christ, accompanied by a generous friendliness for the Church. We have no reason to doubt the main outlines of the story of his so-called conversion. Eusebius says that he received the narrative from the lips of the emperor himself, who attested it with an oath. Perhaps we should have been better satisfied without the oath. We cannot put much confidence in the word of Constantine. But subsequent events give considerable support to his assertion. He says that one day about noon, in full sunshine, he saw a cross of light over the sun with the inscription, "By this conquer." Probably some remarkable appearance—atmospheric or otherwise—was seen by Constantine. He chose the sign of the cross for his standard, and professed to win his victories through the power of the God of the Christians.

19. **Edict of Milan, A.D. 313.**—Towards the close of the end of the year A.D. 312, a most momentous meeting between the two emperors, Constantine and Licinius, took

place at Milan. The result of their consultation was the publication of the famous Edict of Milan. Maximin's evasion of the act of toleration granted by Galerius was the occasion for this great event. The new edict went far beyond that of Galerius. It removed the Christians from all disabilities, and granted them the fullest rights without the galling conditions which in practice had been added to the edict of A.D. 311. It did more. It gave absolute liberty in religion not only to Christianity, but to every form of faith. "We have long seen," it says, "that we have no business to refuse freedom of religion, and that to the judgment and desire of each individual man must be left the power of seeing to matters of belief, according to the man's own free will." Accordingly, the edict of Milan removed all restrictions whatever on religious belief and practice. As Christianity was the one persecuted religion which only needed free scope to flourish, this liberty was most serviceable to it, and was intended to be so. It would have been well if the broad, liberal, enlightened policy of "fair play and no favour" which characterized the Edict of Milan had been observed in later years. But neither Church nor State could appreciate it. Ceasing to persecute Christianity, the government soon came to patronize it. Then the contamination of court intrigue and the association of priestly authority with military power proved far more disastrous to the spiritual life of the Church than all the terrors of torture and execution in the old days of internecine warfare, when the Church was a true city of God, separate from the world, purged by fiery trials, and compelled to rely only on her spiritual resources. During the year A.D. 313 the Edict of Milan was circulated throughout the empire. Ruined and pursued by Licinius, Maximin found that resistance was vain; to save himself from the wrath of his subjects he was compelled to give in his adhesion to the religious policy of the West. Lactantius gives us an awful account of his death-bed

scene that occurred soon after. The miserable man was dying of *delirium tremens*. In his agony he saw God, with His servants arrayed in white robes, sitting in judgment on him. He roared that it was not he but his officers who were guilty. But at length—according to the story of Lactantius—he confessed his guilt, and died imploring Christ to have mercy on him.

Licinius subsequently broke away from the policy he had accepted at Milan, took up the cause of paganism, and attempted a fresh persecution of the Christians; but his defeat by Constantine, in A.D. 324, gave to the latter the unresisted sovereignty of the world, and led to the adoption of Christianity as the state religion throughout the whole empire. The clergy were released from the duty of filling municipal offices, and the emperor gave considerable sums of money towards the support of them. The Church obtained the right of receiving property by bequest. Several of the most unchristian laws were repealed. Crucifixion was abolished. Criminals were no longer to be branded. The exposure of children was forbidden. The State made provision for children whom their parents were unable to support. The liberation of slaves was facilitated. On "the venerable Day of the Sun" no labour except pressing agricultural work was to be done, and the law-courts and government offices were to be closed. An "undenominational" theistic service was provided for the soldiers. The legend of the seven sleepers of Ephesus illustrates the great change which gradually crept over the face of the old pagan world, and transformed it into a countenance of Christian features. These seven young men were supposed to have fled from the persecution in the reign of Decius, and to have hidden themselves in a cave and fallen asleep. When they awoke, on what they supposed to be the next morning, they sent one of their number to the town for food. He was greatly astonished at what he saw. Heathenism had passed away;

the idol statues and temples were gone; in the room of them stood splendid churches. Over the city gates, on the housetops, as well as above the churches, shone the victorious cross in whose name the sleepers had been persecuted—as it seemed but yesterday, but in reality two hundred years before. So great was the visible transformation of heathendom into Christendom. It does not fall within the scope of our narrative to paint the dark picture which shows how beneath this promising exterior the spirit of paganism was rapidly infiltrated into the life of the Church, till it well-nigh poisoned the very heart of it.

CHAPTER IV.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT DURING THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES.

The Churches—The apostles—Presbyters—Deacons—Development of Episcopacy—Easter controversy—Ecclesiastical struggles of the third century—Case of Origen—The adventurer Callistus—Claim of bishops to remit sins—Opposition to this claim—Cyprian—Novatianism—Growing importance of Bishop of Rome—Various Church officers.

1. **The Churches.**—Christianity is essentially a social religion. The true Christian is a subject of the kingdom of God, a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, a soldier in the army of Christ, a brother in the family of the redeemed. The course of his life is to be illustrated by such ideas as nationality, citizenship, military discipline, and domestic union, rather than by the solitary pilgrimage of the palmer or the stray exploits of the knight-errant. He is not the morose hermit vegetating in a mossy cell; he is the Church member, enjoying fellowship with companions and diligently ministering to their welfare. Civic duties were cultivated by the Greeks to the neglect of private rights, and the individual Hellene was expected to sacrifice himself completely to the interests of Athens or Sparta. Christianity begins with individualism. The man, not the city; the soul, not the Church, is its first interest. Still, when it has won a soul, it proceeds to link that soul with kindred souls. The brotherhood of Christians beats the communism of Spartan citizenship on its own ground, while at the same time it dispenses with the galling

restraints of such a legislation as that of Lycurgus, and accords the largest liberty to all its members.

This social character of Christianity is evident from the first. After the close of our Lord's earthly ministry the Christians of Jerusalem continued to meet daily for worship and communion. When evangelists went abroad with the gospel, each one became a nucleus about which converts gathered, so that little groups of Christians were found scattered about in distant cities; while the members of all these separate groups cherished a common tie of brotherhood with their fellow-Christians elsewhere. To these groups was given the name of Churches. There would be a great Church in a city, such as the Church at Antioch, the Church at Rome, etc.; but where only a few Christians were to be found within reach of each other, they felt the mutually attractive spirit which knits soul to soul, and formed a Church even in some cases out of one household, *e.g.* the Church in the house of Nymphas at Laodiceæ. At the same time it is to be observed that St. Paul rose to the conception of a larger Church, uniting all Christians in the one mystic body of Christ, and growing into one glorious temple for the habitation of the Spirit of God. This magnificent ideal of the perfected Church floated over the heads of the primitive Christians, and drew them together in mutual affection.

2. **The Apostles.**—Every community must have some organization, or it will degenerate into a mob. The most democratic society must have its officers for the regulation of its affairs. Even a meeting of anarchists requires a chairman. Christians were required to do all things decently and in order, and therefore it was necessary that some arrangement should be come to for the regulation of the proceedings of the Churches. Our Lord, however, does not appear to have laid down any rules of Church government, nor to have appointed any system of ecclesiastical polity. He did not say whether He desired

His society to be Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational, or with any other particular form of discipline. The Church of Rome has preserved what are called "Apostolical Constitutions;" but it is certain that these hierarchical regulations did not come from St. Peter and his companions. We have no reason to believe that the apostles elaborated and left behind them any definite scheme of Church government which subsequent ages were bound to follow in obedience to apostolic authority. Such organization as grew up in the Church was partly determined by the spirit of Christianity itself, partly regulated by the precedent of the synagogue of the Jews and the religious clubs of the Gentiles, partly initiated by the apostles and partly necessitated by the circumstances of the times.

Naturally, the apostles would take the lead in the infant communities which were formed out of their converts, just as our missionaries are now compelled to do in founding new Christian Churches in heathen lands. A similar work was carried on by the fellow-travellers of the apostles, Timothy and Titus.

3. *Presbyters*.—The first order of officers in the primitive Churches was that of bishops. The bishops were also called presbyters, or elders. This is no longer a point on which difference of opinion is possible with any one who has considered the arguments of those writers who have most thoroughly discussed the subject. For example, Dr. Lightfoot, the Bishop of Durham, in his essay on "The Christian Ministry," and Mr. Hatch, in his Bampton Lectures on "The Organization of the Early Christian Churches," both clearly demonstrate the identification of the bishop with the presbyter.

The analogy of the elders of a Jewish synagogue would suggest a similar arrangement in a Church of Christianized Jews, and as Jewish missionaries first carried the gospel among the Gentiles, the offices and titles of their home Church would naturally travel with them. But the name

"presbyter" would not be unfamiliar to Greek ears. In Asia Minor the members of the governing council of a city were called "presbyters."

In considering the functions of these Church officers we must entirely banish from our minds the associations of modern times. Preaching was not the chief work of the ministers in the early Church. They were expected to be qualified for administering spiritual instruction, and St. Paul mentions aptness to teach among the good points of a bishop. But he also writes of giving special honour to those presbyters who have this gift. Thus he says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, *especially* those who labour in the Word and in teaching" (1 Tim. v. 17). This signalling of the teaching elders for the more marked honour plainly implies that there were elders who did not teach. Moreover, there were great preachers and teachers who did not belong to the organized ministry, such as evangelists, prophets, and other men with "gifts of teaching."

What, then, was the chief function of the elder? It was administration—the government of the Church. Nearly all the directions in the pastoral epistles indicate this fact. The elders are called rulers. The analogy of the synagogue will throw some light on their office. The rulers of the synagogue were not rabbis or scribes, but leading citizens chosen for the government of the community. The presbyters were the rulers of the Christian synagogue, the Church. They were elected by the people, and their authority was subject to the popular vote. Important questions were discussed in the Church and decided by the members. But the elders presided, directed, and guided throughout.

Their work may be divided into two branches—discipline and finance.

1. *Discipline*.—This assumed a much more prominent place in the early Church than is accorded to it in the

present day. The Christian was regarded as the member of a society which had a right to inquire into his conduct and to sit in judgment on his delinquencies. The purity of the Church was jealously guarded. Scandals could not be avoided, but they were not ignored. The offender was examined, reprimanded, and in hopeless cases excommunicated. With the Jews the elders who sat in the upper seats of the synagogue on the sabbath at the hour of worship met in the same place on the week-day, as rulers of the "*synedrion*," for the government of the district. In the same way the Christian elders took their seats as rulers in the Church when questions of discipline arose. In addition to inquiries into moral conduct, secular differences among Christians came before the presbyters, because the Christians felt that it would be a scandal to bring these differences into the heathen law-courts, and preferred that they should be settled by their own brethren.

2. *Finance*. This constituted no small part of a presbyter's work. The contributions of the Church were at first laid at the feet of the apostles. Subsequently they were received by the presbyters. The Churches were benefit societies; charity to poor members took a most prominent place in their affairs. As the first preaching was chiefly acceptable to the poor, and as there were many who were persecuted and disowned by their kindred, and so made poor by their Christian profession, the care of the indigent became a most important matter. Then there were the "widows," whom the Church regarded as especially under their charge. Travelling Christians were hospitably entertained by their brethren in the towns through which they passed. To guard against imposture, certificates of membership were provided. It was the duty of the elders of the Church to which a man belonged to furnish him with a certificate, and it was the duty of the elders of any Church he might visit to examine the certificate. In addition to these provisions, elders who had not private

means, and evangelists on special missions, needed to be supported out of the Church funds. Thus the management of finance became increasingly important.

We have seen that the presbyters were also called bishops. The question may be asked, Why were the two names given to the same officers? Presbyter was the more Jewish name, bishop was a Greek name; and we find that the officers of Gentile Churches were more often called "bishops," while those of Jewish Churches were generally named "elders." But Mr. Hatch, in his "Bampton Lectures," gives us good reason for thinking that the name "bishop" had especial reference to financial functions. He points out how there were among the heathen religious associations open to women, freedmen, and slaves, provided with a common fund, and sometimes having a common meal in which the members shared. Charity was one of the objects of these societies. The officers who administered the finance were called "bishops." Even the permanent officials of a municipality were described as "bishops" while they were engaged in arranging the public moneys. When, therefore, the presbyter was acting as an almoner, it seems that he was called a "bishop."

4. *Deacons*.—The second order of officers in the early Churches was that of the "deacons." It was the second in rank, but the first in institution; that is, if we are right in assuming that "the seven" who were appointed to the care of the Hellenist widows at Jerusalem may be called "deacons." The name is not given to them. But what we know from the earliest accounts of the office inclines us to class them with those who subsequently bore the name. The functions of a deacon are nowhere defined in the New Testament. The directions in the pastoral epistles refer only to his character. Justin Martyr, writing before the middle of the second century, describes the deacons as distributing the elements at the communion,

and carrying away a portion to the absent. As the requirements of the Church grew, and its organization was elaborated, the diaconal functions became more definite and various. In addition to the stewardship of property and the work of an almoner, the deacon assisted the bishop in the exercise of discipline by making inquiries into cases, was sent on embassies, took part in the services, and maintained order in public worship. He was to see that no one loitered in the porch, or whispered or slept in church. St. Chrysostom says, "If any one misbehave, call the deacon." In these later times the deacons do not appear to have been nearly so numerous as the presbyters. The office of deacon was regarded as one of special honour—as a treasurership is with us. So at length it came about that no cardinal, but the Archdeacon of Rome, was regarded as the second highest ecclesiastic in Christendom, the pope only standing above him.

There were also deaconesses in the primitive Church, *i.e.* women who seem to have discharged towards the poor women members functions similar to those of the deacons, though the distinctive title "deaconess" does not appear to have been employed outside the New Testament in early times. Possibly widows were chiefly chosen for the office; but probably virgins were also appointed. Pliny refers to two "handmaidens" whom the Christians call "ministers."

5. Development of Episcopacy.—In order to understand the development of the hierarchy during the period now under our notice, two great changes must be clearly observed, *viz.* the growth of the episcopate and the first appearance of sacerdotalism. Roughly speaking, the one belongs to the second century and the other to the third. As Bishop Lightfoot has clearly shown, the close of the first and the beginning of the second centuries see the distinct and official separation of one bishop from his brethren in the presbytery, and his elevation above them in recognized superiority of rank.

By the middle of the second century the two orders have grown into three. We have now bishops, presbyters, and deacons. But as yet the bishop is no priest—or rather all Christians are regarded as priests. No mystical sacerdotal notion divides clergy from laity. The word "priest" first appears as an official title in the third century. At the same time, the power and authority of the episcopate are then enormously increased.

The way in which the single bishop emerged out of the body of presbyters is very simple, and the transformation, which may have commenced during apostolic times, appears to have taken place most gradually and quietly. It was inevitable that there should be some more prominent members in a community of persons who were regarded as equal in name and office. The leading spirit always comes to the front. Order would require a president, and though at first no special honour might be conferred on one who was only regarded as the chairman of a meeting, his office would in time inevitably lift him above his fellows—especially if he were chosen on account of his fitness for ruling. Justin Martyr, in his account of the communion, refers to a "president" who divides the elements. Then as Christianity spread from the central Christian community in a town, a number of smaller communities would spring up in the suburbs. These were closely affiliated to the mother Church, and elders were told off to take charge of them. In this way the presbytery was divided, and a single elder came to have charge of a single mission Church, while the presiding elder or bishop took the oversight of the whole. Thus innocently and naturally grew up the distinction between the presbyter's parish and the bishop's diocese. Still, though this was the case, all the elders remained in fellowship with the central Church, and the bishop was only one of them elevated to the position of president. Moreover, long after the separation between bishop and presbyter, it was customary to see a bishop

presiding over a single Church. Excepting where the growth of branch mission Churches about the mother Church laid the foundation of the diocesan system, this simpler arrangement was the rule. The first step, then, was to have one instead of many bishops in a Church, and the elders under him all remaining in the same Church. It was a later step when the number of bishops was still further diminished, and their authority extended over districts including several distinct Christian congregations. It would seem that where the process of organization was deliberate and intentional, the object was to guard against divisions. Thus Jerome, looking back from a later age, says, "The apostle teaches us clearly that the bishops were the same as the presbyters. If afterwards one was elected to a higher rank than the others, this was done to prevent schism." But a variety of causes brought about the change, and tended still further to increase the power of the episcopate—persecution, for example, in calling for sudden action in irregular ways, like that of the dictator in times of national distress; the advancing wealth and social position of the bishops; Judaizing heresies with their notions of a Levitical system; the example of the centralizing system of the Roman government.

But while the first appearance of the bishop, apart from and above his brother elders, came about simply and peaceably enough, the growing assumption of authority by the episcopate met with strenuous opposition. Even when the authority of the bishop was conceded, it was limited to his own Church; and each Church jealously guarded its liberty. This point is clearly shown in the "Easter Controversy."

6. Easter Controversy.—The Christians of Asia Minor fixed their Easter celebration at the 14th Nisan, the date of the Jewish Passover. Thus they held it on different days of the week in order to keep to the same day of the month. But the Christians of the West always com-

memorated the death of Christ on a Friday, and His resurrection on a Sunday—as is now the custom with us. Towards the close of the second century, Victor, Bishop of Rome, tried to compel the Eastern Churches to conform to the Western usage. Synods met to discuss the question. Most of them agreed with the Western custom. But the synod which met at Ephesus, under the presidency of Bishop Polycrates, adhered to the Eastern time of celebration. Then Victor took a very foolish step. He cut off the Churches of the East and excommunicated their members. This was an unheard-of piece of impertinence. The central position of Victor in the metropolis of the world, and the age and fame of his Church, tempted him to assume a preposterous superiority over his brethren. He did not make the assumption, however, until he had found his opinion supported by the majority of bishops elsewhere. He claimed to speak, not on his own authority, but as the mouthpiece of Christendom. He had no right even to go thus far. Nor was it ever recognized hitherto that the decision of one synod was binding on Churches in other districts. Nay, it was not held that the minority, who differed from the decision of the majority, were bound to follow it. The synods met for conference and mutual advice. They were not recognized as possessing any authority. Clearly this was so now, for the bishops of Cæsarea had no hesitation in differing from their brethren in the West, and in refusing to agree with the decision of the majority of the synods. There is no thought of insubordination, rebellion, or schism. Perfect freedom is maintained on all sides. This makes the passionate outburst of Victor's despotism look positively absurd. It was the first faint foreshadowing of papal pretensions, the first effort to grasp at world-wide authority on the part of the Bishop of Rome. And it was a complete failure. Victor was born many centuries before his time. Those free Churches of the second century could suffer no

Hildebrand to domineer over them. A synod was held in Gaul to consider the latest stage of the question, and the astounding action of the Bishop of Rome. Irenæus, writing in the name of his colleagues, communicated to Victor the results of the deliberations. He deals with the erring bishop very courteously, but at the same time very firmly. Irenæus admits that his own view of the time of Easter agrees with Victor's, but he protests most decidedly against the attempt of the Bishop of Rome to impose a uniform rule on all the Churches. He points out that the Eastern method is no innovation, while he admits that inaccuracies may have crept into various Churches through negligence. "And yet," he adds, "all these lived in peace one with another, and we also keep peace together. Thus, in fact, the difference in observing the fast establishes the harmony of our common faith." He reminds Victor that when Polycarp was in Rome, though he observed the Eastern Paschal custom, and though slight differences arose on other questions, that point caused no breach of harmony with Anicetus the bishop. Copies of this letter were distributed among the Churches, for Irenæus felt as much at liberty as Victor to address his brethren throughout the whole world; and, indeed, it was customary that the conclusions arrived at in the discussion at a synod should be thus communicated to the bishops in other districts, while at the same time those bishops and their Churches reserved to themselves the right to assent or to differ as they thought fit. It is pleasant to see Irenæus, who is sometimes claimed by the champions of hierarchical authority, thus acting as a peacemaker by taking the side of liberty, breadth of sympathy, and variety of procedure. Clearly second-century Christendom will entertain no dream of a papacy.

7. Ecclesiastical Struggles of the Third Century.

—The third century of the Christian era, like the sixteenth century in English history, was a time of severe eccle-

siastical controversy. Among ourselves, the fifteenth century's doctrinal battle with Rome gave place in the succeeding age to discord in the bosom of Protestantism, in the uprising of Puritanism against prelacy. So in the early Church the conflict with monstrous heresies, which engaged the attention of the theologians of the second century, was followed in the third by a contest within the fold of orthodoxy of champions of liberty, in opposition to the supporters of episcopal authority and priestly claims. The offenders of the second century are "heretics," those of the third "schismatics." But there is this difference. Our English Puritans endeavoured to uproot an old-established system. The Puritans of the third century resisted the growth of a great innovation. In this respect we may better compare their conduct with the political action of Hampden and his friends when they contended for the ancient rights and liberties of the people. This struggle occupied the greater part of the century. It ended in the defeat of the Puritans. The hierarchical party was victorious all along the line. Before the century was out, presbyters were transferred into priests, authority to grant absolution was claimed and exercised by the clergy, bishops were raised high in power over the Churches within their diocese, and the conception of one visible Church, secession from which is schism, advanced.

8. **Case of Origen.**—The Church at Alexandria cherished a simple, popular system of government, together with the broad theological liberalism for which it was famous, long after other Churches had advanced far in hierarchical development. Here the first difficulty arose. Origen, the great philosophic teacher of his age, who was engaged in training the catechumens, and whose lofty mind and eloquent tongue drew great numbers of all classes to his lectures, saw with dismay how sadly the bishops were degenerating in character, and he did not hesitate to denounce their worldly ambition. "If Jesus Christ," he

once said, "wept, with reason, over Jerusalem, is it not yet more evident that He must weep over the Church, which, having been built for a house of prayer, has been made a den of thieves by the avarice and luxury of some Christians? Would that I could say there were no leaders of the people in the number!" Origen could not have been aiming at his own bishop, Demetrius. Nevertheless, that bishop took offence at the slashing criticism of the young teacher, and soon showed that he owed him a grudge. While on a journey through Syria, Origen was invited to preach at Cæsarea in the presence of some bishops. At that time there was no rule forbidding the preaching of the laity. But when Demetrius heard of the event his jealousy fired up, and he wrote to Origen, forbidding him to do what other bishops held to be perfectly lawful. The bishops at Cæsarea replied, saying, "Wherever laymen had been found capable of edifying the brethren, they were invited by the bishops to preach." But Demetrius was obstinate, persisted in his veto, and recalled Origen to Alexandria. Origen obeyed, and all was tranquil for a time.

A short while after—about A.D. 228—when Origen was again at Cæsarea, he was raised to the office of a presbyter, and consecrated by the neighbouring bishops. Demetrius, viewing the incident from his own jealous standpoint, naturally regarded it as an insult to himself and his office. He convoked a synod of Egyptian bishops and presbyters, which pronounced Origen unworthy to fill the post of catechist, and expelled him from the Church. He convened a second synod, which was nothing but a packed assembly. There were no presbyters in it, and only those bishops were invited whom Demetrius selected. Such a gross outrage on justice shows how popular the cause of Origen must have been. It is needless to say that the council of the bishop's nominees decided in accordance with the bishop's wish; Origen was declared unfit to hold

the office of presbyter. This decision was ratified by all the Churches which knew nothing of the question. Those in Palestine, Phœnicia, Arabia, and Achaia were nearer the scene, and they refused to give their assent to the tyrannical decree of Demetrius's synod. All through this affair we may detect the uprising of hierarchical authority in opposition to liberty of speech and action. But a far more discreditable exhibition of the same tendency was seen at Rome in the person of Callistus.

9. The Adventurer Callistus.—The story of Callistus is given to us by Hippolytus, Bishop of Portus (near Rome), who must have been intimately acquainted with the facts, and cannot be suspected of intentionally perverting them. That his enmity to Callistus inclined him to take the darkest view of them may be admitted. But those facts which Hippolytus, as a contemporary and leading actor in the scene, records, speak for themselves. This much must be first noted, because the revelations of the Bishop of Portus are of the most astounding character. Callistus, venerated as a saint and martyr among the popes of Rome, stands before us exposed as an unscrupulous adventurer, his reputation scorched and withered as much by the bare story of his evil life as by the fiery indignation with which his great opponent tells it.

Callistus was a clerk in the employ of one Carpophorus, a Christian officer in the imperial household, and a banker. As he was a professed Christian, his master entrusted him with large sums of money, by means of which he established a sort of savings-bank, and obtained a number of deposits from widows and poor Christians. These trusts he embezzled. After a time he found himself in pecuniary difficulties. Unable to face inquiry, he absconded, found a vessel at Portus, and went on board, intending to sail in her wherever she might be bound. But news of his flight had got wind, and Carpophorus hurried down to the ship, which was anchored in the harbour. As the ferryman

who was conveying the banker to it was slowly approaching, Callistus had time to descry his master at a distance. In desperation he leaped into the sea. The sailors hastily manned a boat and saved him, and a great shout was raised on shore at the capture. The wretched defaulter was put to the treadmill. In course of time, however, it was found that the affairs of the bank were in such confusion that only Callistus could unravel them. Accordingly, in answer to the representations of the depositors, the clerk was released. But he had no money for the bank's customers. To divert attention from his awkward position, possibly to bring his ignominious career to an end with a glorious reputation for martyrdom, the cunning adventurer tried a new scheme. He went to the Jewish synagogue on a sabbath day and disturbed the worship. For this wanton insult he was dragged before the city prefect by the outraged congregation. It was exactly what he expected, exactly what he had aimed at. In the court he played the part of a martyr persecuted by fanatical Jews. He was scourged, and sent to a mine in Sardinia. When Marcia, the mistress of the Emperor Commodus, who was interesting herself in the cause of the Christians, called for Victor, the Bishop of Rome, and inquired of him what martyrs were in Sardinia, Victor gave her a list, but, knowing his previous career, omitted the name of Callistus. Subsequently, when an order for the freeing of the exiles was sent to the governor at the mines, seeing he was not included in it, Callistus fell on his knees and pleaded in abject humiliation for his liberty. He gained his point, as these disreputable adventurers generally do. He was sent to Antium, and maintained there with a monthly allowance of food. After Victor's death, Zephyrinus, the new bishop, sent for Callistus, and gave him the appointment of custodian of the cemetery that afterwards went by his name! This foolish action almost takes away our breath. It would seem that the bishop was

a man of exceedingly weak character, who had been associated with Callistus in former years, and was quite under his power. Henceforth all the policy of Zephyrinus was directed by his friend. Callistus was now started on a career of success that was to end in nothing short of the episcopate of the first city of Christendom. His policy was all in the direction of increasing the priestly authority of the clergy. It was his daring inventiveness that prompted Zephyrinus to issue decrees containing the most monstrous assumptions, such as the poor bishop would never have dreamed of when left to himself. To this man more than to any other must be attributed the rapid advancement of sacerdotal notions in the Church. The blasphemous claim to forgive sins, which has ever after been put forth by the Roman Catholic priesthood, was first definitely formulated by Callistus. Those who defend that claim have to face the fact that it was founded by an absconding banker's clerk, an ex-convict, a man whose character was so tainted that his bishop dared not ask for his pardon in a general amnesty. Friends of the papacy have also to face the fact that this low criminal, thief and hypocrite as he was known to be, not only wormed himself into the confidence of the Bishop of Rome, but contrived to get himself elected as the successor of Zephyrinus. It is plain that with the ecclesiastical development of the clerical office its moral character and discipline were subject to a shameful deterioration.

10. Claim of Bishops to Remit Sins.—The most bold priestly innovation of the age was the claim to remit sins in virtue of his pontifical office, which was put forth by the Bishop of Rome. Callistus urgently pressed it upon Zephyrinus, and, though not till after encountering serious opposition, the bishop formally published the claim. "I hear," writes Tertullian, with scornful irony, "that an edict has gone forth, ay, and that a peremptory edict: the chief pontiff, forsooth, I mean the bishop of bishops,

has issued his commands—'I remit, to such as have discharged the requirements of repentance, the sins both of adultery and fornication.' On the death of Zephyrinus, Callistus succeeded in getting himself elected to the vacant bishopric, and disgraced the Church with his government for eleven years (A.D. 211-223). Taking his stand on the decree of his predecessor, Callistus asserted his right to pardon sin. Several causes concurred to find acceptance for this fearful claim. (1) *Laxity of morals*. It was sins of profligacy which were singled out for special favour. It is only too easy to see how a bad popularity would result from this policy. (2) *Reaction against Puritanism*. The Montanists, a sect of enthusiastic reformers originating among the excitable population of Phrygia, were the great defenders of the rights of the laity and the rigorous supporters of Church discipline, and they became the leading opponents of the growing hierarchical party. They asserted that the Holy Spirit was given to individual Christians, and not to official personages only. But they were guilty of great extravagances. They exalted individual inspiration to a dangerous position, to the neglect of the revealed truth of Scripture. Thus the wildest doctrines were possible, and disorderly rhapsody came to take the place of sober scriptural teaching. In morals they were strict to harshness. They recognized no possibility of restoration for Christians who had fallen into mortal sin. It is one grand merit of the Catholic Church that she generally took the side of charity in judgment and mercy in action; this cruel doctrine of the Montanists was rightly seen by the Church to be foreign to the gracious gospel of Christ. In resisting it, however, a great impulse was given to those who not only proclaimed the possibility of pardon, but also offered to dispense it. (3) *The rivalry of the martyrs*. The greatest danger to the compact authority of the hierarchy was offered by the irregular action of the martyrs. An

extravagant reverence was accorded to those brave men who suffered for the faith; their sufferings came to be regarded as of vicarious value; and by the superfluity of their merits it was thought that they might obtain pardon for fallen Christians. They were besieged with applications for certificates of absolution, which unfortunately many of them consented to grant. The bishops, seeing with dismay this growth of an ecclesiastical influence altogether outside the office of the clergy, would not be outdone by the martyrs. Thus the two claims to remit sin were pressed forward in competition. But they were not equally scandalous; for dangerous and wrong as was that of the martyrs, it did assume that high character was essential to the exercise of it, while the claim of the bishops was totally independent of character, and rested solely on their official position. Moreover, it is a significant fact that Callistus, the very man who advanced the lofty prerogative of priestly absolution, also contended that if a bishop were guilty of any sin, even a "sin unto death," he ought not to be deposed.

11. Opposition to this Claim.—This scandalous claim of the Bishop of Rome was not left unchallenged. Besides the general opposition of the Montanists, which was heavily discounted as being loaded with dissenting prejudices, powerful voices, which the Church could not afford to disregard, were lifted up in protest against the iniquity. Long before he became a Montanist, the great Latin father, Tertullian, the most eloquent writer since the decay of pagan literature, poured forth all the passion of his hot African blood in denouncing it. He was at Rome when Zephyrinus was on the eve of issuing his decree, and St. Jerome says it was the insults heaped upon him by the Roman presbyters in his controversy with them that drove him into Montanism. Be that as it may, Tertullian stoutly resisted the priestly innovation. He had news of the publication of the decree after he had re-

turned to Carthage, and he wrote a vigorous protest against it in his treatise "*De Puditiâ*." "Who remitteth sins but God alone?" he says. "Exhibit, therefore, even now to me, apostolic sir, prophetic evidences, that I may recognize your divine virtue, and vindicate to yourself the power of remitting such sins!" He distinctly rejects the application to the Bishop of Rome of our Lord's words to St. Peter about "the keys," and about "binding and loosing." The claim which he will not concede to the bishop, he equally refuses to the martyr. "Who permits *man* to condone offences which are to be reserved for *God*," he says, "by whom those offences have been condemned without discharge, which not even apostles (so far as I know)—martyrs withal themselves—have judged condonable?" It is a pity that Tertullian should have weakened his attack by mixing up the question of the unpardonableness of certain sins with that of the right of bishops to pardon them, because it gave his opponents an opportunity to retort on the same ground, and to assume that the defence of the merciful character of the gospel was bound up with the exercise of priestly absolution.

Nearer home the opposition was taken up by Hippolytus. This was at the time when Callistus was bishop. Disgusted and indignant at the power which was entrusted to the hands of such a man, Hippolytus was most sternly opposed to him on account of his bad character. The heresies with which the unscrupulous adventurer played and dallied also required to be exposed. But Hippolytus was a theologian of the broad and liberal school of Origen, and the priestly assumptions, which were doubly offensive to him when advanced by such an impostor as Callistus, were also disapproved of on their own account. The magic of absolution was contrary to his spiritual and philosophic view of religion, and the tyranny of priestism opposed to his conceptions of Christian liberty. In his "*Refutation of All Heresies*" he exposed the disgraceful career and

contested the corrupt doctrines of Callistus. The opposition of Tertullian and Hippolytus, the attacks of the Montanists outside the Church, and the contention of the liberal party within her pale, were all frustrated, and by the year A.D. 236 the priestly authority of the episcopate in Rome was firmly and irrevocably established. The subsequent years of the century saw the further extension of the system.

12. **Cyprian.**—St. Cyprian, whose noble pastoral work has already been referred to, was the grand champion of the unity of the Church, the authority of bishops, the priesthood of the clergy, and all that High Church movement which was making such rapid progress in his day. He was a man of genuine Christian character, who faithfully discharged his duties according to his views of his office, and anxiously laboured for the welfare of his flock. Such a bishop is not to be named in the same breath with a disreputable adventurer like Callistus. Nevertheless, the position claimed for the episcopate by the ex-convict bishop of Rome was that which the martyr-bishop of Carthage most zealously held to. In Cyprian, more than in any one else up to his time, we meet with the assumption of the priestly office with all its rights and powers. He does not hesitate to bring in the whole imagery of the Levitical priesthood of the Jews, and to apply it to the Christian ministry. In his writings the translation of presbyter into priest is complete. He tells us that he once heard a voice from heaven, saying, "He who believes not Christ when He makes a priest, will begin to believe Him when He avenges a priest."

In the year A.D. 248, only two years after his baptism, Cyprian was raised to the bishopric of Carthage by a sort of popular acclamation. Five presbyters, who seem to have felt aggrieved at the slight put upon their years in this election, protested against it. Among them was Novatus, who afterwards became Cyprian's chief opponent.

Novatus so far broke with the bishop at once as to appoint a certain Felicissimus to the diaconate without consulting Cyprian. The bishop expressed his indignation at the act of irregularity, but took no steps to nullify it.

It was the question of Church discipline which brought about an open breach between Cyprian and his opponents. This question arose during the great Decian persecution, when Cyprian was living in retirement, but keeping up an active intercourse with his flock by letter. So large a number of Christians proved unable to endure the fiery ordeal, that it became a question of first magnitude to decide what should be done with them. Cyprian had formerly been on the side of severity in refusing all pardon to "the lapsed." But, on hearing of the grief and penitence of these great multitudes of weak Christians, his heart was softened, and he felt strongly inclined to favour them. Accordingly he wrote most judiciously, advising that their case should stand over till the restoration of peace. "He who cannot endure the delay," says Cyprian, "may obtain the crown of martyrdom." His opponents went much further. They evidently sought popularity at the cost of laxity of government. Then a new element was introduced, to make the difficult position of Cyprian more complicated. The opposing presbyters went to the martyrs and confessors for certificates of absolution, which were granted in the freest manner possible—even given to whole households, with the formula "Communion to ——— and his house." Cyprian wrote to his people, complaining of the action of the martyrs and presbyters as a great violation of episcopal rights. "That the Lord should not be appeased through bishops and priests," he says, "but that the Lord's priests being forsaken, a new tradition of a sacrilegious appointment should arise, contrary to the evangelic discipline," etc., is rebellion against the bishop's counsel, the result of which is that "all priestly authority and power is destroyed by factious conspiracies." Cyprian appealed

to Rome—not to any pope, for there was no bishop there at the time, an election being then in course—but to the presbyters and confessors. He received in reply their full approbation of his conduct. It is difficult to adjudicate on the merits of a case like this. Both parties were wrong. The sacerdotal theory of Cyprian is utterly foreign to the religion of the New Testament, but his earnest desire to maintain the purity of communion, while exercising charity to the penitent, is wise and good. On the other hand, we may sympathize with the liberalism of the presbyters and martyrs in their protest against the episcopal despotism of Cyprian, and at the same time we must deplore the laxity of their views of discipline and the sacerdotal power allowed to the martyrs.

13. **Novatianism.**—After the rigour of the persecution was relaxed, in the year A.D. 251, Cyprian returned to Carthage, and immediately proceeded to organize a visitation throughout his diocese to ascertain the necessities of the poor and the condition of the people generally. Felicissimus resented what he regarded as an intrusive ecclesiastical inspection, openly resisted the bishop, and formally seceded from communion with him. Cyprian replied by putting Felicissimus out of communion with the Church. Then Novatus, Felicissimus's friend and patron, repaired to Rome. He must have been an unscrupulous man, for while at Carthage he had led the party of lax discipline in opposition to the judicious middle course taken by Cyprian; but when he found it was the strict party that was opposed to the episcopacy in Rome, he proved that his one motive was opposition to the bishops, by at once reversing his tactics in regard to the restoration of the lapsed and throwing in his lot with the rigid disciplinarians. The views of the two parties were illustrated by the position of the two candidates for the vacant bishopric of Rome. Novatian was the candidate of the strict school, Cornelius that of the more merciful party.

When Cornelius was elected, Novatian refused to submit to the decision. Persuaded by the restless Novatus, he was consecrated Bishop of Rome by three obscure Italian bishops. Thus arose the Novatian schism.

Novatian proceeded to carry out his principles in the government of the Church. Absolution for mortal sins was refused. The followers of Novatian called themselves "the pure," and so far broke with the older communion as to impose a second baptism on their adherents. They were not "heretics," however, in the sense of persons who differed in doctrine from the accepted creed, but "schismatics," only divided from the Catholic Church in government. The question came before Cyprian. It was thought that, as he had opposed the lax discipline of his presbyters, he might look favourably on Novatianism. But even on the ground of discipline Cyprian was too large-hearted to agree with the harsh method of the stricter party. His course had been marked by moderation on this point throughout. On another point he was decidedly opposed to the Novatians. A novel question was now raised. Could there be two Churches and two bishops of separate communities of Christians in the same place? Could Cornelius and Novatian both be bishops of distinct Churches at Rome? Cyprian decided in the negative. He was a great advocate of the unity of the Church. He held that the seamless robe of Christ must not be rent. We should call the Novatians a sect, and speak of the "Novatian denomination," and recognize it side by side with the older Church. But this view of varieties of separate "denominations" in the one spiritual Church was not possible to Cyprian. With him the Catholic Church was one external and visible body, separation meant schism, and the ministry and communion of dissenters were invalid, and not to be recognized as lawful or possible. Probably Novatian would have held the same views in regard to the Catholic party if he had got the upper hand. Novatianism obtained a

considerable footing in Africa and spread through the East; but it met with vigorous opposition on all sides; and it was successfully ejected from the Church, and forced to stand quite by itself as the system of an ex-communicated dissenting body.

14. Growing Importance of the Bishop of Rome.

—Through all these struggles we must have observed the rising influence of the Bishop of Rome. The papacy was no sudden invention; it was a growth of centuries. It was quite unknown in the earliest ages, and long after the first three centuries it was still only partially developed. Even in the time of Constantine nothing that we understand by the papacy was recognized. But we may detect the seed of the monstrous Upas tree even in those simple early times, when no prophet dreamed of its deadly character. The causes of the growing importance of the Roman see lie on the surface of history. The great antiquity of the Church at Rome; its reputed connection with St. Peter and St. Paul; its numbers and inherent importance; the reputation for martyrdom which it attained, standing, as it did, in the forefront of the battle, at the very mouth of the lion; its membership of political officers in the imperial household; its central position in ready communication with the whole world; above all, its proximity to the seat of the secular government;—these facts largely account for its growing importance. Ambitious bishops came to think that as the imperial rule radiated from one centre, the ecclesiastical government should follow the same lines. Victor was the first Latin bishop—the earlier bishops having been Greeks. We have seen how he showed the Roman's inbred thirst for power in his foolish attempt to coerce the Eastern Churches on the small matter of the time for the celebration of Easter, and how his pretensions were not allowed; and we have heard Tertullian ironically calling Zephyrinus "the bishop of bishops" in the matter of priestly absolution. The scornful Carthaginian's words

have a strange significance to us, who have seen their mockery turned into a terrible reality by later events. Cyprian calls the Roman episcopate "Peter's chair," and regards the Bishop of Rome as the representative of the outward unity of the Church.

Nevertheless, with all his high churchmanship and reverence for catholic unity and episcopal authority, Cyprian does not hesitate to oppose the Bishop of Rome when he thinks that bishop is exceeding his powers. For if Cyprian was very vigorous in defending the authority of a bishop, he was equally decided in defending his independence. He regarded each bishop as supreme in his own diocese, and he would brook no interference of one bishop with the affairs of another—not even though the intruder were the Bishop of Rome. Cyprian was brought into controversy with Stephen, Cornelius's successor, on the question of heretical baptism, the latter holding that baptism by heretics was valid, while Cyprian considered it to be invalid. They had a right to their individual opinions. But when Stephen proceeded to force his view on the whole Church, Cyprian opposed the high-handed act of despotism. "For," he wrote, "neither did Peter whom first the Lord chose, and upon whom He built His Church, when Paul disputed with him afterwards about circumcision, claim anything to himself insolently, nor arrogantly assume anything; so as to say that he held the primacy," etc. Stephen resented this opposition, and even went so far as to issue a decree of excommunication against the African bishop; but the weapon had none of the dread power of the thunderbolts which Innocent III. issued from the same seat many centuries later. Cyprian summoned two successive synods of African bishops, and they both pronounced in his favour. Then he referred to the great bishops in the East. Dionysius of Alexandria sided with Cyprian. Firmilianus, Bishop of Cæsarea, not only agreed with Cyprian on the point of doctrine, but entirely repudiated Stephen's pretensions to

universal authority. The bishoprics of Cæsarea and Alexandria were then regarded as equal in rank to that of Rome, and the holders of them felt themselves insulted by the ambitious conduct of Stephen. Firmilianus addresses Stephen in the strongest language. "You are worse than all heretics, . . ." he says. "How great sin have you heaped up for yourself when you cut yourself off from so many flocks! For it is you yourself that you have cut off. Do not deceive yourself, since he is really the schismatic who has made himself an apostate from ecclesiastical unity. For while all may be excommunicated by you, you have excommunicated yourself alone from all." Thus speaks a leading prelate of the third century to an arrogant Bishop of Rome. Clearly we are far from the days of the papacy. Moreover, it is to be observed that those "Apostolical Constitutions" which seem to belong to this time admit the equality of bishops and ignore the primacy of St. Peter. When the word "pope" is first used it is given freely to bishops away from Rome. We hear of the Pope of Alexandria and the Pope of Carthage.

15. **Various Church Officers.**—During the first three centuries, as the organization of the Church and the conduct of public worship became more elaborate, various officers were added to those already mentioned, viz.: (1) *Subdeacons*, whose function was to assist the deacons; (2) *Readers*, who had the custody of the sacred manuscripts, and read the Scriptures at the public services; (3) *Acolyths*, who acted as personal attendants of the bishops; (4) *Exorcists*, who were officially recognized as possessing the power of expelling evil spirits, and who were especially required to do so in the case of new converts, as well as to assist at baptisms; (5) *Precentors*, who had charge of the musical part of the service; (6) *Janitors*, or *doorkeepers*, who took care of the churches. *Catechists*, the teachers of candidates for baptism, did not belong to any special order. They might be presbyters, or deacons, or even laymen.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES.

The Catechumenate—Training of catechumens—Possible revival of the system—Baptism—Agape—Christian worship in the second century—More elaborate worship of the third century—Fasts and festivals—Sunday—Christian morals—The family—Luxury—The Church and the world—The army—Theatre, circus, and amphitheatre—The clergy—Slavery—The catacombs.

1. **The Catechumenate.**—In apostolic times admission to the Christian brotherhood was given in the freest possible manner, and without any delay, to all applicants who were believed to make a genuine confession of faith in Christ. Every convert was required to pass through the one straight gate; but none were made to linger on the threshold, or to wait in a vestibule of novitiates, before enjoying full membership. Baptism followed immediately upon an acceptance of the gospel, even in the case of a person who heard it for the first time; and directly he was baptized, every new Christian was welcomed at the Lord's table and permitted to share in all the privileges of the Church. There was no inner circle of the initiated like that associated with the Greek mysteries. Every believer in Christ was free to penetrate as far into the divine mysteries of the kingdom of heaven as his own spiritual powers would carry him.

But in course of time a great change came over the method of admission into the Church. The city of God, which had stood, like the New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse, with its gates open day and night, ready to give a hos-

pitabile reception to every stray wayfarer who might seek its shelter, became a citadel jealously guarded against the intrusion of spies and treacherous enemies. Baptism was separated by a long interval from the first confession of faith in Christ. A person in this intermediate condition was called a "catechumen." The period was occupied with careful training, and the candidate was tested by successive examinations before he was received into the communion of the Church. The change was brought about gradually. The new system began to appear early in the first century, but it did not take its most elaborate form till the close of the third century. The causes out of which it arose were various. The growing enmity of the heathen made it necessary to close the doors against intruders who offered a false profession of faith only to work havoc in the Church. Then the privacy into which persecution drove the Christians prevented strangers and new converts from having that general knowledge of the gospel which was open to all, when all who liked could attend the preaching at the Christian assemblies. The elaboration of doctrine led to the over-valuation of a knowledge of theology such as was not required when personal faith in a personal Christ was the sole requisite for admission to the privileges of the Church. A superstitious reverence for baptism and a dread of the mortal character of sin after baptism came in later, to lead to the preparation of the candidate for the solemn rite by a proportionate amount of preliminary instruction and discipline. The whole tendency to develop a more and more elaborate organization in the Church, which became very marked as time went on, would favour the substitution of a carefully graduated process of admission for the simple, uncere- monious reception permitted by the apostles. All these influences working together brought about the system of the Catechumenate.

2. **Training of Catechumens.**—First of all the

candidate was put through a preliminary examination. According to the most ancient of the so-called "Apostolical Constitutions" it was required, "That those who present themselves for the first time to hear the Divine Word be brought to those who are appointed to teach, before the Christian community assemblies, and that they be asked what has led them to the faith; that the Christians by whom they are brought testify that they are competent to hear the Divine Word, and that they know their conduct and manner of life." The question of character is all-important. The candidate must renounce all pagan associations and all immoral connections.

After passing this preliminary inquiry, the candidate was led on through a succession of stages. The first stage was that of the *Audientes*, or "hearers." Some writers, indeed, have described an earlier stage, in which the converts were not admitted within the precincts of the Church at all. But there is no good ground for believing in the existence of a distinct class of persons in that condition. The "hearers" received regular instruction from teachers appointed for the purpose. They also came to the church to hear the Scriptures and the sermon. But they were required to stand in the "Narthex," or portico—a position which unbelievers also shared—and they were not admitted into the body of the church. After the sermon they were dismissed with the benediction of a solemn and affectionate prayer. The word "Mass," which is used for the Communion Office in the Roman Catholic Church, is derived from the "dismissing" of the catechumens previous to that more sacred service to which they were not permitted to remain.

As the system became more developed, a second stage seems to have followed that of the "Audientes." Catechumens in this class were called "*prostrati*," or "*genuflecti*," i.e. kneeling or praying catechumens, who were permitted to stay and take part in the prayers.

When these stages were passed, the candidate was again examined both as to his conduct and as to his knowledge. If he passed the test, he was placed among the "competentes," or candidates for baptism, and received special instruction in preparation for the rite.

The education given to the catechumens varied in different places. In Alexandria it was of the highest character. There the school of the catechumens became a sort of Christian university, and the greatest thinkers of the age thought it an honour to be classed among the catechists. Clement and Origen were successive teachers in this school, and poured forth their lofty philosophic ideas in the instruction of catechumens. As it was not required of the teacher that he should belong to any particular office or rank in the Church, great scope was given to new learning and freedom of thought.

The teaching of the catechumens occupied the time before the commencement of public worship. The course described in the Coptic, the oldest version of the "Apostolical Constitutions," begins with instruction in the nature and character of God; it goes on to the doctrine of Christ, and to that of the Holy Spirit. Scripture history is thoroughly taught, and the ethics of Christianity carefully inculcated. To converts from the corruptions of paganism, living in the tainted atmosphere of heathen society, this last topic was of supreme importance. It is interesting to observe that the early Church made a great point of teaching moral duties as well as requiring moral conduct.

The period occupied by the training was usually three years; but it could be hastened in cases of special proficiency. On the other hand, lapses from the standard of Christian conduct would throw the candidate back. "It is not the time, but the course of life, which is judged."

3. Possible Revival of the System.—It is evident that the system of the Catechumenate was of very great

importance in the early Church. We have nothing like it now. Our Sunday school and Bible class arrangements are quite different. The catechumen was only admitted to his class on confession of faith; he was only retained in it while his conduct remained consistent with his confession; he was put through a regular progressive system of instruction; and at the end he was expected to come forward for admission to the Church, or the whole process would be considered null and void. The preparation of candidates for confirmation may be thought to bear some analogy to this ancient institution of the Catechumenate. But it is usually far too slight and brief to take the place of it.

The question as to the revival of this institution is well worthy of discussion. Much may be said on both sides. On the one hand, it would be well if our Sunday school and Bible class teaching were more thorough, systematic, and progressive. It is also most desirable that young Church members should be well instructed in Christian truth, and well trained in Christian discipline. A greater fruitfulness in decision of character and confession of Christ is earnestly sought by all devout teachers, and that something should be done to bring about a more ready connection between Bible class teaching and Church membership is eminently needful. But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that a great amount of knowledge is given in the present somewhat irregular way to those who could not submit to more systematic instruction. Thus the results of the Catechumenate are often obtained without the tedious formality of the process. Then it is most important to guard against the delusion that Christianity is a matter of knowledge rather than of life, that it can be had by learning rather than by decision of character, or that the successful passing of an examination is equivalent to a certificate of Christianity. We must also beware of deterring ignorant but genuine believers in Christ from joining the communion

of their fellow-Christians. After all, the example of Christ and His apostles is of far more weight than all the lessons of expediency taught by the early Church.

4. Baptism.—Admission to the Church was from the first signalized by the rite of baptism. In apostolic times baptism followed immediately on confession of faith in Christ. Gradually, as we have seen, an interval of preparation was introduced. But at the end of the training of the catechumen, if the candidate satisfied his instructors, he was received into the fellowship by baptism. This is not the place for discussing the question whether or no infant baptism were practised in the days of the apostles. Whatever views we may hold on that point it is evident that when the Church was chiefly composed of converts in adult age, adult baptism must have been the usual form of the rite. When we come to the second century we find that adult baptism was common, while infant baptism was also practised. Tertullian protested against the administration of baptism to infants, showing, therefore, that it was prevalent in his age. His protest was ineffectual. In the third century infant baptism became the more usual practice, and in course of time it entirely superseded adult baptism.

Justin Martyr gives us an account of baptism which will help us to understand the place it took in the middle of the second century. "We will now relate," he says, "after what manner we dedicated ourselves to God when we were made anew through Christ. So many as are convinced, and believe the truth of what we teach and affirm, and who promise to be able to live accordingly, are taught both to pray, and with fasting to ask of God the remission of their past sins, while we join with them in their prayers and in their fast. Then they are conducted by us to a place where there is water, and they are regenerated after the same manner of regeneration as that in which we ourselves were regenerated. For they then

make their ablution in the water, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost." It might appear from this language of Justin's that even thus early the doctrine of baptismal regeneration had appeared in the Church. But the fact that Justin required decision of character and newness of life first will incline us to see that he used words concerning the symbol which in their full sense he would apply only to a spiritual change.

In the third century the ceremony of baptism becomes more elaborate. Two days—the Easter vigil and the eve of Pentecost—are set apart for it. The men are separated from the women. All spend the night in prayer and fasting in the church. At cock-crowing the solemn service commences. The bishop or presbyter then calls up each of the catechumens separately, and bids him renounce the evil one. "I renounce thee, Satan," he replies; "thy service and thy works." After the minister has bidden every evil spirit depart, the candidate is taken to the water within a curtained enclosure in the middle of the building, divested of all clothing, and dipped three times. First the men are led to the laver, attended by deacons; then the women, attended by deaconesses. The baptized person makes a simple confession of faith, and is received into the fold of the Church.

During this period baptism by immersion was the rule. But sprinkling was also permitted on exceptional occasions. Subsequently it was allowed that even a baptism with sand in the desert, where no water was to be got, was valid. The deep significance of the rite and the great act of consecration implied by it were felt to be more important than the mode of performing it.

5. *Agape*.—Once admitted into the Church by the rite of baptism, the novice found himself surrounded with hearty sympathy, and united to his fellow-Christians by ties of the closest communion. The author of "Ecce Homo" has

compared the Church to a club. It was that and more. A club feeling, an *esprit de corps*, united the members. But the stronger bonds of brotherly affection drew them closer together. The whole Church was one great family, every separate community was like an affectionate household, and persecution cemented the union of Christians.

This fellowship was both expressed and strengthened by participation in a common meal. The "*Agape*," or "love-feasts," have their analogies in the habits of the Essenes and in the common meals of the members of Greek and Roman guilds. But the origin of them is distinctly Christian; indeed, probably authorized by the apostles. At first they were held every evening. After a time they came to be held once a week—on Sundays. They were not merely symbolical festivals like the Lord's Supper, but substantial meals, for fish, meat, poultry, cheese, milk, and honey were to be seen on the tables. Two tables were furnished—one for the men and the other for the women. A presbyter pronounced the blessing. In the first age the meal was followed by the Lord's Supper. After the *Agape* and the Lord's Supper, lights were brought in and a religious service held, when one would sing a hymn, and another expound a portion of Scripture. The offerings of the congregation for the benefit of the poor were collected, and the evening ended with the kiss of peace given by the men to their brethren and by the women to their sisters. It is impossible for us to over-estimate the happy influence of this simple, homely custom. It broke down social barriers and united all fellow-Christians in brotherly equality. Rich and poor sat down together at the same table and ate of the same food. There sat the slave, formerly at the mercy of a master who could sell him at the market, or slay him outright on the slightest provocation without fear of inquiry, now eating out of the same dish with his master. Very beautiful is the humility and love of the richer members who joyfully submitted to this regulation,

and equally beautiful is the simplicity and wisdom of the servants who did not abuse it.

6. Christian Worship in the Second Century.—

Early in the first century, so early that none of the Fathers mention the association of the two, the Agape and the Lord's Supper, which were held simultaneously when St. Paul wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians, were severed; and the Lord's Supper celebrated early in the morning, while the social meal was still kept to the evening. The reason for this alteration was probably a decree of Trajan's, referred to by Pliny the Younger, in which the emperor forbade the assembling of secret societies. The Agape became a simple social meal, and the Lord's Supper, being held in full daylight, ceased to have its more alarmist character in the eyes of the law. The Agape was continued for some generations. Tertullian refers to its innocent, happy associations. But as the Church rose in social position the old family spirit of its childhood faded away. Abuses of the festival through the growing luxury of the wealthy also made some of the leaders of the Church regard it with disfavour. After the close of the third century it gradually fell into neglect, though traces of it lingered in various forms for some generations later.

We have seen Pliny's interesting notice of the Christian assemblies of his time (page 40). The meeting before day-break, the morning hymn to Christ, the exhortations to purity of life, the mutual consecration of the disciples—these were the simple and fervent characteristics of the worship confessed to by the slaves who were tortured in the proconsul's court.

Justin Martyr describes the proceedings which were customary in the middle of the second century. "On the day called Sunday," he says, "all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the

president orally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying 'Amen'; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given; and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well-to-do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and, in a word, takes care of all who are in need." Out of this system of communion offerings for the poor grew the first conception of a sacrifice in connection with the Lord's Supper. The gifts were oblations of thanksgiving, and the table on which they were placed came to be called an altar for these simple sacrifices. Great was the perversion when phrases originally employed in all innocence for thank-offerings came to be used to describe an atoning offering for sin in the sacrifice of the mass. Justin Martyr gives a more detailed account of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. "Having ended the prayers," he says, "we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he, taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying 'Amen.' (This word 'Amen' answers in the Hebrew language to 'So be it.') And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who

are called by us 'deacons' give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion."

7. More Elaborate Worship of the Third Century.

—The development of the Catechumenate led to a change in the arrangement of Christian services. The Lord's Supper was separated from the public worship. The solemn feast was always reserved for the baptized and faithful servants of Christ. But so many who were not in this class now attended the Christian assemblies, that provision had to be made for a mixed congregation, in which catechumens and outsiders could join with the recognized members of the brotherhood.

We can form a tolerably clear conception of the order of worship in the third century. It has now become in many respects more elaborate. In the first place, instead of the private rooms where the early Christians used to meet, we now see a number of Churches. They are not formed after the model of the pagan temple, but according to the pattern of the Roman basilica. In the large vestibule are the catechumens and all strangers. The nave of the Church is occupied by the baptized Christians—the women sitting in one part and the men in another. If a daring young man ventures into the seats of the opposite sex he is to be *smitten* by a deacon, and sent back ignominiously to his own place. At the further end is the apse, in the centre of which is the bishop's chair, where he sits surrounded by his elders. Without the accompaniment of instrumental music, the whole congregation joins in singing psalms from the Old Testament, or Christian hymns composed in Greek and Roman metres. The well-known "Gloria in Excelsis" has come down to us from these early times as a morning hymn sung by the Church of the third century. Portions of Scripture are read from his desk in the apse by the reader. The preacher follows

with an extempore discourse, which is usually expository and hortatory, and founded on one of the lessons. He may be a layman, if approved of by the bishop. At the conclusion of the sermon, prayer is offered on behalf of the catechumens. The person who offers this prayer may also be a layman. After the prayer of dismissal, the catechumens and all strangers leave the building, and the doors are watched for fear of intrusion. Now commences the solemn Eucharistic service. The communion table stands, not against an end wall, but where the apse joins the nave. The clergy draw near to this table from behind. The laity approach it from the opposite side. Thus all gather round the table, ministers and people being face to face. All stand in prayer. Sitting at prayer is considered unbecoming and not allowed. Kneeling is held to be a suitable posture in domestic worship. But, like Scotch Presbyterians in the present day, at the Sunday service all the congregation stand during the prayers, in witness—some say—of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then all partake of both bread and wine—some reserving their portion to be eaten at home, if they have not come fasting.

8. **Fasts and Festivals.**—At first the Lord's Supper was observed daily. Then it came to be celebrated only on Sundays. Subsequently Wednesdays and Fridays were added as days of solemn convocation and communion. Fasts were also frequent on these days. From the earliest times Easter was observed. The controversy on the proper date for keeping the festival which divided the East and the West in the second century, is evidence of that fact. Pentecost is the only other festival of which we have any mention up to the end of the second century. The celebration of Epiphany was added in the third century. In the assembling of Christians at the tombs of the martyrs on the anniversary of their deaths we have the first germs of saints' days. But during the whole of the first

three centuries there is no sign of prayers to saints, or to the Virgin Mary. The memory of the martyrs is honoured, and exhortations are founded on their examples. As we have seen, superstition begins to surround them with an abnormal sanctity even at this early time. Living martyrs are credited with powers of priestly intercession, and relics of dead martyrs are treasured with an affectionate reverence, which soon degenerates into a superstition of magical influence.

9. **Sunday.**—From the earliest times Sunday was regarded as "the Lord's day," in commemoration of the resurrection of our Saviour. But it did not at first take the place of the sabbath. There was then no thought of applying the fourth commandment to Sunday. The Lord's day and the sabbath were kept quite distinct. This is certain from the fact that many Christians observed both days. Not only did Jewish Christians observe the seventh day in more or less near resemblance to the Jewish form, but in the East Gentiles also made a festival of the day. Thus, for those who retained sabbatic notions, Saturday was the sabbath and Sunday the Lord's day. It was not customary at first to abstain from working on Sunday. Slaves in pagan households, and others engaged in business in a world which took no note of Sunday, could not refuse to work on that day without producing confusion and disorder; none thought it their duty to do this. The Christian assemblies met before dawn, so that it was possible to attend them and enjoy the full privilege of the communion without breaking into the hours of labour. The transference of sabbatic ideas to the Lord's day came about gradually. We may observe two views in the Church on this point. In Alexandria the freer school of theology long maintained the equal sacredness of all days, while the idea of the special sanctity of Sunday was growing up in the West. There is no indication that labour on the Lord's day was considered to be unlawful during any part of the

first two centuries. Early in the third century, Tertullian strongly urged the cessation of all work on Sunday. He did this, not on the ground that the sabbath was transferred to that day, but because it was fitting that "we should abstain on the day of the resurrection from all that might trouble or distract us, setting aside all business, so as to give no access to temptation." In course of time the practice advised by Tertullian was adopted throughout the Church. After the acceptance of Christianity by the government, Sunday was legally recognized as a day of rest. Christian people will always differ as to the motives which should chiefly urge us to observe the rest as well as the worship of the Lord's day—some deriving the sanction mainly from the Old Testament regulations of the sabbath, others following Tertullian in regarding the Lord's day as most suitably kept only when the worship which was always observed by the Christians on that day is not disturbed by secular distractions. Whatever views we may hold on that point, the unconscious testimony of history in favour of a weekly day of rest is all the more powerful from the fact that when the Church was passing through a transition stage, and had abandoned the Jewish sabbath on the seventh day without as yet consecrating a Christian sabbath on the first, it came to be felt more and more strongly, that the rest which was necessary for Jews in Palestine was necessary for Christians in Europe, and that the worship of the Church required as much separation from business, that it might be observed with due spirituality of feeling, as the worship of the synagogue had required at an earlier period.

10. **Christian Morals.**—Leaving the public worship and assemblies of the Church, let us take a rapid glance at the private life of the Christians of these early times.

The greatest contrast between the Christians and their neighbours was presented by the purity of morals which was the first fruit of the gospel. In an age of fearful

corruption, when vice was repeatedly flaunting itself in broad daylight, in new and more and more hideous forms, the disciple of Christ was required to follow a rule of purity, integrity, and charity.

There were noble exceptions to the general depravity of the heathen. The writings of Seneca and Plutarch, and the lives of the slave Epictetus and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, would do honour to any age, and are rendered peculiarly attractive by contrast with their evil surroundings. No doubt in many a simple farmstead, and in not a few quiet, old aristocratic Roman households, as well as in the squalor of the slave's *ergastula*, the God who is no respecter of persons, and to whom in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable, had not left Himself without witnesses, whose testimony may surprise us in the day when the secrets of all hearts are opened. But these cases must have been exceptional. The type of character aimed at by the greatest moralists was not attractive. Stoicism was cold, hard, and stern. It is true that at this time a movement resembling the humanitarian movement of our own age was apparent, for while Seneca was masculine to rigorousness, Plutarch showed a gentler disposition, and Marcus Aurelius imported a sentiment of melancholy sympathy into the unfeeling philosophy of which he was a disciple. Still there was nothing like the warm spirit of Christianity in this pallid heathen morality. What was most striking in the new type of character introduced by the gospel, contrasting forcibly with the pride and harshness of stoicism, was its childlike humility and simplicity, its mildness and gentleness, above all, its passion of sympathy, the love which is the heart and essence of the Christian life.

11. **The Family.**—Nowhere was the regeneration of morals more marked than in the family. Under the old pagan system, sanctioned as it was by the cruel Roman law, the father was the almost irresponsible despot of his

household. When tired of his wife, he could divorce her at will. If he did not wish to keep all his children, he could expose the infants on the steps of a heathen temple, leaving them to be adopted by some childless or charitable passer-by, or to perish from neglect—sometimes devoured by dogs and wild beasts. The slaves of the household were goods and chattels having no recognized human rights. In many cases the women were as corrupt as the men. Satirists would exercise their wit on the number of husbands who had been owned by a Roman lady.

All this was grossly repugnant to the Christian rule of life, and when a convert passed from heathenism to the new religion, the first requisite was a complete reformation of his domestic habits. Great sanctity was attached to the marriage tie—it was even carried beyond the requirements of the present opinions of Christendom, for a growing disfavour was shown to the second marriage of widows and widowers. The Christian woman took her rightful place in the Church and the home. The abandonment of children was absolutely forbidden. Much importance was attached to family worship. Altogether the purity and affection which brought peace and happiness into a Christian home, when compared with the dissoluteness and tyranny which banished the sacred name of home from many a pagan household, must have afforded the most striking testimony in favour of the faith that was working so great a revolution in the habits of the corrupt and dying old world.

The early Christians were free to acknowledge the beauty and glory of domestic life. Few writings of these primitive times are more eloquent than Tertullian's address to his wife, at the conclusion of which he describes the mutual helpfulness of husband and wife when both are Christian. "What kind of yoke is that of two believers of one hope," he says, "one desire, one discipline, one and the same service? . . . Together they pray, together

prostrate themselves, together perform their fasts; mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining. Equally are they both found in the Church of God; equally at the banquet of God; equally in straits, in persecutions, in refreshments. . . . Between the two echo psalms and hymns; and they mutually challenge each other which shall better chant to their Lord. Such things, when Christ sees and hears, He rejoices. To these He sends His own peace. Where two are, there withal is He Himself. Where He is, there the evil one is not."

Nevertheless, even in the days of Tertullian, a morbid asceticism was growing up, and many were beginning to sound the praises of celibacy. The seeds of that pestiferous system, which degrades our human nature by regarding it only on its baser side, and which teaches that perfection is to be found in the suppression, rather than in the consecration, of nature, were already sown. Their evil fruits, in the separation of religion from common life, instead of the freedom of it to work as the salt of the earth, slowly were developed in the degenerating Church of succeeding centuries. It is fair, however, to bear in mind that the inconceivable abominations of licentiousness, to which all the wealth and luxury of the old world's civilization were made to minister, so revolted the purer minds of the age, that an exaggeration of moral rigour was almost inevitable. Still it is pleasant, when looking back across the gloomy ages of ascetic devotion, to see, especially in the two first centuries of the young Church, how great was the honour given to domestic life, and how free and natural and cheerful was the experience of the early Christians. Those venerated saints and martyrs would not have thanked the mediæval artists for the consumptive, cadaverous figures which serve for their portraits in our National Gallery.

12. **Luxury.**—As numbers of the wealthier classes were drawn into the Church, and longer periods of quiet

between the persecutions permitted, a certain amount of ease and self-indulgence, a growing luxury began to appear in place of the simple habits of the more early times. Tertullian indignantly protested against this tendency. He was especially alarmed at the development of the universal feminine taste for dress. The fashions of the heathen world were copied by the Christian sisters, much to the horror of the more sober section of the community. Tertullian wrote a treatise on "Female Dress," in which he denounced the sin of those who "rub their skin with medicaments, stain their cheeks with rouge, and make their eyes prominent with antimony." "I see some women change the colour of their hair with saffron!" he exclaims. "Ill, ay, most ill, do they augur for themselves with their flame-coloured head, and think that graceful which in fact they are polluting." He is indignant at the use of precious stones. "The only edifice which they know how to rear is this silly pride of women." "Is it thus that she will set her heel on the devil's head, while she heaps ornaments taken from his head on her own neck, or on her very head?" But while rebuking extravagance and display, the early Christian teachers were too sensible to mistake rags and dirt for signs of grace, as the contemporaries of Thomas à Becket delighted to do. The Christians of Lyons and Vienne regarded their exclusion from the public baths as the first stage of their persecution; and Tertullian considered the use of the bath to be essential to health.

13. **The Church and the World.**—There were no monks or hermits in the Church of the first three centuries. Paul of Thebes, and the famous St. Antony, the first of the Anchorites of Egypt, did not invent their novel discipline till the fourth century. Before Christianity was adopted by the State, the Christians were very free in their intercourse with the world, wherever this was possible without contamination. They had no notion of

forming a secluded society of quietists. In their most solemn services they withdrew from the gaze of the public; but in their daily life they mingled freely in the business concourse of their fellow-men. Writing soon after the time of the apostles, the author of the "Epistle to Diognetus" says that Christians "are in no way distinguished by their country, speech, or customs from other men;" that "they neither dwell in separate cities, nor use any peculiar dialect, nor do they lead an unusual mode of life." A hundred years later, when many were driven by persecution to the catacombs for worship, or to the desert for bare existence, Tertullian can say, "We are not Indian Brahmins or Gymnosophists, who dwell in woods and exile themselves from ordinary human life. We do not forget the debt of gratitude we owe to God, our Lord and Creator; we reject no creature of His hands, though certainly we exercise restraint upon ourselves, lest of any gift of His we make an immoderate or sinful use. So we sojourn with you in the world, abjuring neither forum, nor shambles, nor bath, nor booth, nor workshop, nor inn, nor weekly market, nor any other places of commerce. We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you; and in like manner we unite with you in your traffickings—even in the various arts we make public property of our works for your benefit." Clearly these early Christians are no morose cynics; no haughty Pharisees, who dread the defiling contact of publicans and sinners; no upper caste race, shunning the pariahs of heathendom; no idle visionaries, who miss the work of this world in dreaming of the glory of the world to come. They are busy in the factory and the shop; they bargain with heathen buyers and sellers at the market; they even frequent the public baths; in the army Christian soldiers fight as true men; on the high seas Christian sailors brave the perils of the deep side by side with heathen companions.

Nevertheless, there is another side to this picture. The genuine Christian would never have retired from the society of his fellow-men in mere unsociability of disposition. But there were circumstances which frequently checked the freedom of intercourse, which in itself he allowed as innocent and right. Idolatrous rites were bound up with the whole life of the world, both in business and in pleasure. From these the Christians recoiled in horror. Then many trades were banned because they were enlisted in the service of idolatry or immorality. Thus the occupations of diviners, actors, charioteers, and image-makers were positively forbidden in the Church. The chief amusements of the age were grossly vicious, and could not be enjoyed by pure-minded men and women. From these, therefore, Christians necessarily withdrew.

14. The Army.—The relation of the Christians to the army was ambiguous and difficult. Opinions were divided on the subject. Some considered the military profession to be inconsistent with Christianity; others permitted it. There can be no doubt that there were a great number of Christians in the army; the mere existence of the legend of the Thundering Legion proves that. Many of the martyrs came from the army. In the days of conscription Christians would be impressed as much as other men. Now it was always recognized in the Church that the Christian should be a faithful subject of the emperor. The army was one branch of the imperial service, and here the Christian duty of obedience to "the powers that be" was most forcibly called into requisition. But, then, idolatrous rites were bound up with military service; the pagan altar smoked in the middle of the camp; and the love of bloodshed, the horrors of battle, the greed of conquest, were all foreign to the spirit of the gospel. Hence, when enlistment became optional, the teachers of the Church discouraged Christians from joining the army. In the constitution of the Egyptian Church we read, "The cate-

chumen or believer who chooses to be a soldier shall be cut off." One who has been enlisted without his own free will does not fall under the same condemnation; he is only enjoined to respect human life as far as possible. Still, there are instances of soldiers who flung down their weapons and refused to obey orders, on the ground of their Christian principle. These fanatics were not martyrs, but mutineers, who could not but be punished for their breach of discipline, however conscientious may have been the motives that prompted them to it.

15. **Theatre, Circus, and Amphitheatre.**—The character of the popular amusements of the age compelled the Christians to set their faces against them, and to forbid all participation in them. They were tainted by three great evils—idolatry, immorality, and cruelty. The theatre was dedicated to the celebrations of the myths of the gods. It became, therefore, in the eyes of the Christians, a centre of demon-worship. Moreover, the Greek tragic drama, which grave moralists had recommended on educational grounds, because it disciplined the passions by means of fear and pity, was too slow for the jaded taste of Roman voluptuaries. Comedy only was favoured, and that of the grossest character, in which the most immoral subjects were represented in the coarsest manner. Pantomime and ballet-dancing superseded genuine acting. It is needless to say that such debased scenes were shunned by the Christians.

But the most popular amusements of the time were those of the circus and the amphitheatre. The chariot-race divided all Rome into bitterly opposed factions—the "Greens" and the "Whites" hating one another with the hatred of Montagues and Capulets. All serious business was suspended in the excitement of an approaching race. After the first object of imperial policy, which was to provide the idle populace of Rome with corn, the next was to give them amusement. The appetite for pleasure was

stimulated by novel entertainments, which were got up with lavish expenditure.

The most fearful form of amusement was sought in the amphitheatre. In the Coliseum at Rome, the vast ruins of which are even now the most imposing object in that museum of antiquities, fifteen hundred gladiators would be seen contending together at the same time—some with swords, some with short knives, some with nets in which to entangle their antagonists, and tridents to stab them with. The hunting-fields of North Africa were scoured to bring lions and other fierce beasts to Rome, where they were made to fight in the arena with each other and with trained gladiators, or, more shameful still, with helpless prisoners, among whom were often to be found Christian martyrs. The most refined luxury of cruelty was cultivated. Domitian confessed that his greatest delight was to watch the faces of dying gladiators, and compare the varieties of expression with something like scientific interest. These awful scenes of carnage were abhorrent to the Christian conscience; and theatre, circus, and amphitheatre were all three banned to the Church. How could Babylon, drunken with the blood of the saints, afford her a cheerful recreation ground? Tertullian tells a story of a woman who went to the theatre, and came back possessed by a demon, and how in the out-casting, when the unclean creature was upbraided for having dared to attack a believer, he answered, "And in truth I did it most justly, for I found her in my domain." Thus it came about that, with all their natural sociability, the Christians were compelled to live in a measure apart from their fellow-citizens.

16. **The Clergy.**—In these early times the social condition of the clergy was practically the same as that of their fellow-Christians. They married, and lived with their families. The first step towards the celibacy of the clergy was the forbidding of second marriages to them at

the close of the second century. Then it came to be understood that though bishops and priests who were married before consecration to their office were to retain their wives, and though those under promise of marriage might fulfil their engagement, others should not take wives. In A.D. 303 the Council of Elvira ordered all the clergy to put away their wives. It was a hasty act of cruelty which the Church could not suffer; fortunately there was no iron-willed Hildebrand to force the execution of it. At the Council of Nicæa, a few years later, the premature law was revoked. Thus we see that for the whole of the period under our review the ministerial office was not severed from the domestic life of the people, though unhappily there was a growing tendency in that direction. Surrounded by his children, with his wife by his side, the Catholic bishop of these early times was able to sympathize with the home joys and sorrows of his flock.

During the whole of the first three centuries of Christianity no distinction in dress was made between clergy and laity. No episcopal robe, no priestly vestment, no professional cloth, indicated the officer of a Christian Church. Those quaint garments for which the devotees of ecclesiastical millinery in our own day contend so zealously in newspaper and law-court are relics of antiquity, no doubt; and some of them can be traced back to very early times. But, then, if the clergy wore such articles of clothing, so did the laity. The priestly vestments of a later age are nothing but the common dress of the people in a more remote period. The researches of archæology show us that the distinction of attire originated in the conservative habits of the clergy, and their reluctance to change their dress with the fashions; just as the peculiar dress of quakers and of blue-coat boys results from a similar conservatism in more recent times. The *alb* is just the old Roman's shirt, worn especially by the deacon. "He," Dean Stanley says, "as the working-man of the clergy,

officialated, as it were, in his shirt-sleeves." In later times and in colder northern climates this shirt was drawn over a fur coat, sheep-skin, or otter-skin, and came to have the name of *super-pellicium*, or *surplice*—i.e. the *over-fur*. Over the shirt came the Roman *toga* or *pallium*, which survives in the archbishop's *pall*. Then there was the long overcoat called *caracalla*, and afterwards *casaca*, or *cassock*. The *stole* was nothing but a simple pocket-handkerchief.

Before the adoption of Christianity by the state in the reign of Constantine, no distinctive civil status was given to bishops and presbyters. They were liable to the same burdens as all other citizens—service in the army, for example. Nor was there at first any reluctance on the part of the Church to combine secular and spiritual employments, for were not the two greatest apostles a fisherman and a tentmaker? Christian ministers who followed them might be found at the weaver's loom and behind the tradesman's counter. But as the numbers of Christians became more dense and the work of the ministers increased, they gradually came to be entirely devoted to their religious office; not at first because the sanctity of it would be desecrated by contact with common business—for all work was held to be sacred—but simply because the work of the Church occupied all the strength and time of its officers. When, however, the notions of Jewish priesthood were associated with the clerical office, the separation of the spiritual caste from secular employment was contended for on religious grounds. Cyprian demanded that bishops should not be called off from the service of the altar and the sacrifices for any other work, but should be left at leisure for prayer and supplication.

17. Slavery.—There was one great and terrible institution in the social life of the Roman empire, the very existence of which was utterly opposed to the spirit of Christianity. This was the institution of slavery. While the slaves themselves had no legal rights, could be abused

and outraged without redress, and too often sank into low animal habits, degraded in soul as well as in body, the free population became averse to all labour, and the vices of idleness sprung up like toadstools in a neglected field. We must admire the patience and wisdom of the inspired writers of the New Testament, in not denouncing everything connected with a custom so foreign to their principles of human brotherhood and Christian love. For had the early Church declared war on slavery, she would simply have brought frightful misery on her wretched *protégés*. Surrounded by millions of slaves, the free Roman population felt as though it were living on the crater of a volcano. "As many enemies as slaves" was a popular proverb. Ghastly recollections of the servile wars roused a shuddering sense of horror like that with which old Anglo-Indians look back on the Mutiny, and a guilty fear prompted the most cruel suppression of the least appearance of a revolt. If the apostles had been "Abolitionist" preachers they might have raised a sanguinary rebellion, but they could not have overthrown the jealously guarded institution which the whole world united to maintain. They took a wise course. They quietly promulgated principles the acceptance of which was sure to destroy the life of slavery from within. It would have been madness to have attacked this great tree with the reformer's axe. The blow would only have recoiled on the hand that struck it. But by washing away the soil in which it grew, the tree was, so to speak, slowly killed and finally flung down from its deepest roots.

The amelioration of the lot of the slaves generally, which took place during the early years of Christianity, cannot be traced to the influence of the new religion. It was due partly to the teachings of Stoic philosophy, partly to humane imperial legislation, and partly to the effects of private clubs. But within the Church slavery was completely changed. The Christian slave was a free man

in Christ. If his master was a Christian, he was his brother. The slave might be the superior; for it was a familiar sight to see the master waiting in the vestibule as a humble catechumen, while the slave passed into the church and took his place in the rank of the communicants. It was not infrequent for masters on their conversion to liberate their slaves; and the Church provided special facilities for this process, which was performed in due form before the bishop as an act of Christian grace. If they were pleasant and lovely in their lives, in their deaths Christian slaves and freemen were not divided. While pagan tombs commonly bore inscriptions referring to slaves, the Christian burial-places in the catacombs have not been found to contain any such allusions. Slaves and their masters lie there side by side as brothers, sleeping equally in Christ till both shall awake in the kingdom of heaven.

18. The Catacombs.—No relics of ancient Christianity are more interesting than the catacombs—those vast passages and halls excavated in successive layers, one beneath another, sometimes to the number of seven, extending for hundreds of miles of intricate ramifications, and honeycombing the ground in the immediate neighbourhood of Rome. The earliest of them date back to the first century of the Christian era, for in one an inscription of the reign of Vespasian has been found. During the next two centuries, they were gradually dug out, until the marvellous extent of them as they are now discovered was completed. They were never inhabited by the Christians, although fugitives from persecution occasionally hid in their labyrinths of passages; nor were they originally intended as places of worship. They were burial-grounds, cemeteries. The family spirit of the Church was illustrated by this arrangement for a common sepulchre. When many loved and honoured by their fellow-Christians were interred here, it was natural that their brethren should look with reverence

on their sleeping-places, and thus it became customary, as we have seen, to hold services and to celebrate the Lord's Supper at the tombs of the martyrs on the anniversary of their deaths. From this simple, touching habit arose the first practice of worshipping in the catacombs. During the Decian persecution it was dangerous to assemble in broad daylight, and then Christians would hold meetings in these burying-places. But generally the worship conducted there was only that of martyr-memorial services.

As we pass through the little doorway and down the broken staircase, and find ourselves in one of these strange homes of the dead, we cannot but be impressed with mingled feelings of awe and wonder. The preternatural darkness at noontime, the solemn stillness, the oppressive atmosphere, the hopeless maze of passages, in which, according to weird stories of the guides, adventurous explorers have lost themselves and perished of hunger or terror,—all these elements combine to make an impression which one who has once felt it can never forget. When the visitor has accustomed his eyes to the feeble light of the taper, he finds that he is traversing very narrow passages, which intersect one another repeatedly, and open every now and then into vaulted chambers. The walls are cut into niches—*loculi*—where, tier above tier, lie the remains of Christians of Rome who lived sixteen hundred years ago. There are the bones of martyrs reverently gathered and treasured up by their friends. There have been found eucharistic vessels with wine-stains still upon them—stains once mistaken for martyrs' blood. On the stone slabs that are commonly used to close in the *loculi* we read pathetic inscriptions:—"To our sweetest father, well-deserving, in peace." "To the well-deserving Tigris. . . I, her son, made this for my mother." "Alas, O father, ever to be remembered, cause of long grief to me, thou didst often desire to die in the arms of thy children, to gently pass away in the sweet embrace of thy offspring.

These wishes the grace of the exalted Christ fulfilled. Happy was thy life, and happy also was thy passing away." At one place we read the simple words, "One who loved me;" at another "the sore broken husband" "bewails in tears and in bitter lamentations." A Christian matron is described as "Faithful to God, endeared to her husband, the nurse of her family, humble to all, a lover of the poor." An infant's tomb is inscribed with the beautiful phrase, "Agnellus Dei"—"God's little lamb." But Christian faith and hope lighten the gloom of these chambers of the dead. The prevailing tone of the inscriptions is a simple, cheerful faith. "What God wills," writes one resigned mourner. "Thanks be to God," says another. We often meet with the words "Hope," "Faith," "Love," "Peace." "Eternal light to thee," says one to his lost friend. "May you live among the holy ones;" "May you live in the Name of Christ;" "Peace be to thee;" "Remember, O Lord Jesus, our child," are specimens of many pious exclamations recorded on these old Christian graves.

The darkness of death was further dispelled by the beauty and symbolism of Christian art. Some of the frescoes discovered in the catacombs are in genuine classic style, showing that the Christians had gifted painters among their numbers, showing too that they did not treat beauty of form and colour with Gothic barbarity. The pictures are mostly symbolical. The earliest art has left no portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ. Reverence or humility seem to have prevented the attempt from being made. When our Lord is represented, it is not at first with an idea of portraiture, but symbolically. The most familiar symbol, so dear to the hunted flock in dread hours of persecution, is the good shepherd. He stands with a lamb on his shoulders, surrounded by his sheep. Another picture is that of a lamb as an emblem of Christ. We frequently meet with a fish, that old emblem for Christ, chosen because of the mystical suggestiveness of the letters,

which, spelling the Greek word for fish, also form the initials of our Lord's name and title. The anchor of hope is often to be seen. Bible stories are fully illustrated. The story of Jonah is a great favourite. We can well understand how, when the city would often resound with the fierce cry, "The Christians to the lions!" the narrative of Daniel should be dwelt upon with keen interest.

Nothing in the grave writings of the great doctors of the Church helps us so well as these catacombs to sympathize with the life of homely, simple-minded Christians in the first three centuries. In their cheerful thoughts, their lively imagination, their tender affectionateness, their calm, strong faith, their utter unconsciousness of any prospect of being canonized and worshipped by later generations, these saints and martyrs here reveal themselves as of one flesh and blood with their fellow-Christians of all time. We have to reach across many centuries to find them, but when we discover them they are our brothers. Here in the catacombs desolate husbands mourn their lost wives, and broken-hearted mothers weep for children that are no more. Here faith and hope console the sorrowful. Here bright thoughts of the future outfly the weary hours of trial and suffering. Here, too, a common devotion to the one Lord and Saviour knits Roman nobles and Roman slaves in bonds of union with their fellow-Christians of the one great family of God in every age and under every clime.

THE END

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